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DISCOVER INDIA

MAY-JUNE 2019 | ₹100

ISSN 2455-3417



WHERE THE WORLD TRAVELS

TOP 10 ROMANTIC GETAWAYS

*Exclusive
interview*
**PRINCESS
DIYA
KUMARI**

INSIDER'S GUIDE
to **Kochi**
Mumbai

VARANASI
in
24 Hours

INSTAGRAM'S NEW MUSE
Jaipur's
City Palace

IN SHOTS
UNTOUCHED
ARUNACHAL
PRADESH



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MAY-JUNE 2019

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“
If there is one place on the
face of this Earth where all the
dreams of living men have found
a home from the very earliest
days when man began the dream
of existence, it is India.”
—Romain Rolland



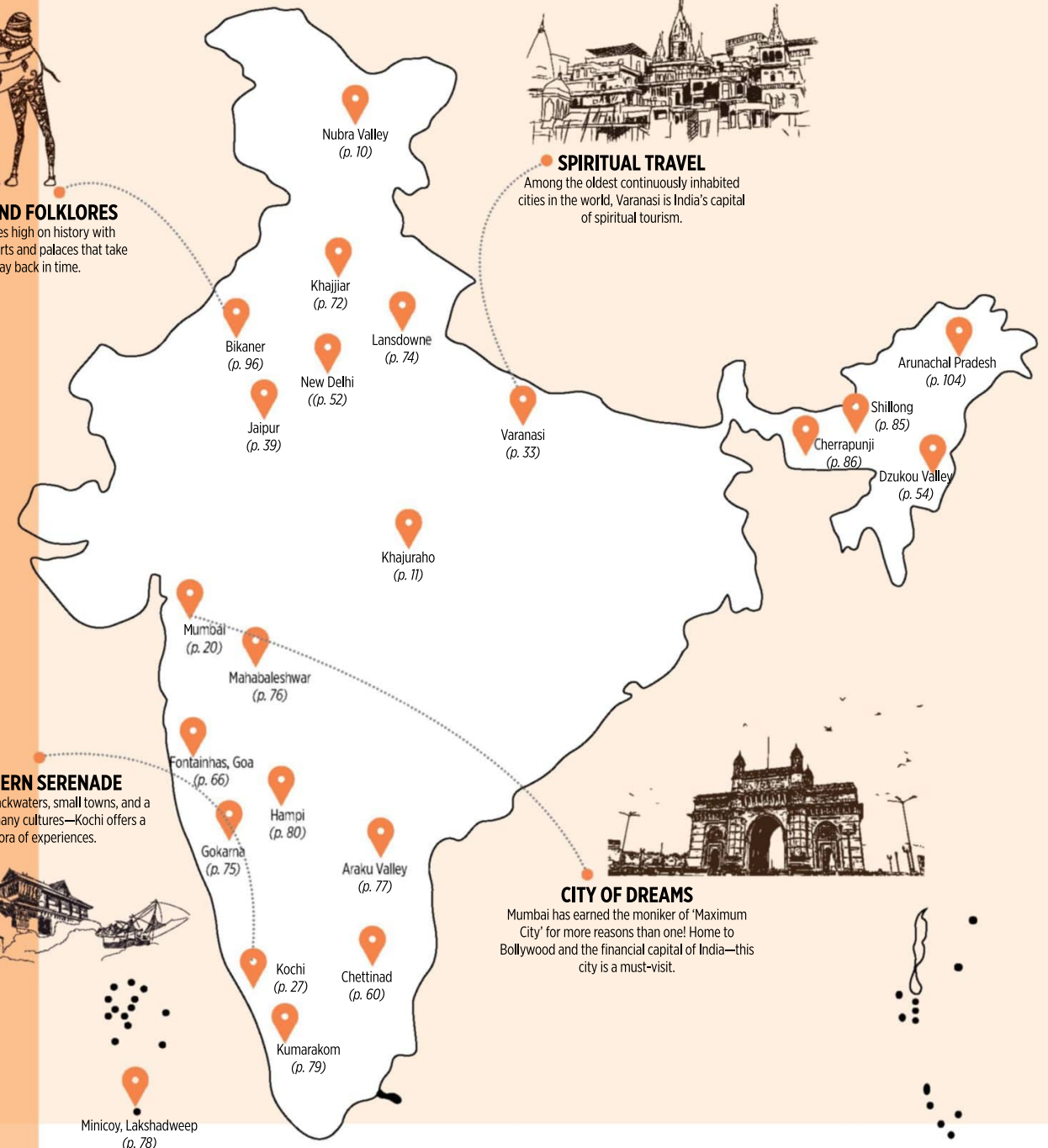
FORTS AND FOLKLORES

Bikaner scores high on history with innumerable forts and palaces that take you way back in time.



SPIRITUAL TRAVEL

Among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Varanasi is India's capital of spiritual tourism.



SOUTHERN SERENADE

Breathtaking backwaters, small towns, and a rich blend of many cultures—Kochi offers a plethora of experiences.

CITY OF DREAMS

Mumbai has earned the moniker of 'Maximum City' for more reasons than one! Home to Bollywood and the financial capital of India—this city is a must-visit.

Disclaimer: The map used here is for illustrative purpose only and is not claimed to be either true or correct. The official boundary of India is as notified by the Survey of India (Map not to scale)

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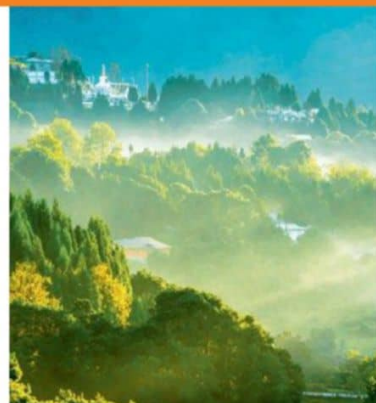
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Come, experience the two distinct cultural worlds of Kerala!

Experience two distinct realms of Kerala's rich heritage. Spend two nights at **Forte Kochi** and explore the vivid history of the quaint town amidst a plethora of cultural experiences. Then be transported to yet another world of exquisite heritage and relish two nights of Kerala's graceful, natural beauty at **Kumarakom Lake Resort** before your holiday culminates with a day spent basking on the calm waters of the Vembanad lake, on a traditionally designed, luxurious houseboat.



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Note: All prices in the magazine are approximate values and subject to change.



Aindrita Mitra
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ON THE COVER
Location: **City Palace, Jaipur**
On the cover: Instagrammers
Vivian & Johannes from
Germany; jovi_travel

O ther than being home to the wettest place in the world, Mawsynram in the northeastern state of Meghalaya (p.84), India, is home to some of the most exotic locales that are at their romantic best in the rains. Looking for a unique destination to enjoy some quiet time, to feel one with nature, or better still, to pop the big question amidst the serenity of monsoon? This issue's cover story on India's 'Top 10 Romantic Getaways' (p.70) is everything you need to plan the perfect itinerary.

If you're travelling to India for the first time, Jaipur is probably etched into your programme. When in this historic Rajasthan city, you must visit the beacon of royal splendour that is the City Palace—located in the heart of the city, and home to the Jaipur royalty. An exclusive interview with Jaipur Royal Family's Princess Diya Kumari (p.36), who is putting India on the global map with her work for underprivileged women through her NGO, Princess Diya Kumari Foundation, is our star feature in this issue. Also, choose from a handpicked list of top 10 hotels for an indulgent stay in Jaipur (p.39).

If you want to explore the lesser-known side of India, a trip to the Northeast is mandatory. Whether it's discovering Nagaland (p.54) or Arunachal Pradesh (p.104), we have it covered with all the information you need to sketch out a bespoke itinerary. The comprehensive city guides (p.20) on Mumbai (home of Bollywood and the financial capital of India) and Kochi (in God's own country, Kerala) give you an insider's take on the best and must-have experiences.

So, what are you waiting for? Let India's treasure trove mesmerise you this season!

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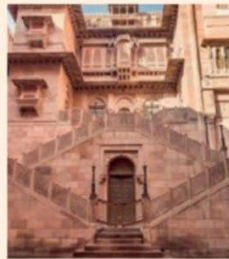
CITY FOCUS

Get an insider's guide to navigate through Mumbai, the entertainment and financial capital of India.



EXPLORE

Be among the first few travellers to discover the magic of Dzukou Valley in northeastern Nagaland.



EXPERIENCE

Centuries' old palaces and forts live to tell the tale of the erstwhile royal families in Bikaner, Rajasthan.

HEMANT KHENDILWAL, FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; SUGATHO TRIPATHY; ROOP DEY/ALAMY

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Video Producer **ANISH ARJUNAN**
Manager Digital Marketing **NIDHI KANDARI**
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Deputy Art Director **MUKESH KUMAR**

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CIRCULATION & VISIBILITY

Manager **BIJAY KUMAR KAR** bijay.kar@burda.in
Assistant Manager **SANJAY KUMAR** sanjay.kumar@burda.in

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MICHAEL NEUWIRTH
Tel: +49 89 9250 3629
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jeannine.soeldner@burda.com

USA + CANADA + MEXICO
SALVATORE ZAMMUTO
Tel: +1 212 884 48 24
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36 Exclusive: Interview with Princess Diya Kumari of Jaipur Royal Family



RC PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

Alappuzha KERALA

WHY VISIT? Cruising through the palm-fringed network of idyllic lagoons and lakes here is the undisputed highlight of every trip to 'God's Own Country'.

The glistening backwaters of Alappuzha run parallel to the slender coastal strip of the Arabian Sea, and lined with white-sand beaches, swaying palm and coconut groves, and iconic houseboats. Kumarakom and Vayalar are the places that attract most travellers for their surreal sunsets.

GETTING THERE Kochi (55 km) and Trivandrum (150 km) are the closest airports that offer global connectivity. keralatourism.org

Nubra Valley Jammu & Kashmir

WHY VISIT? A mysterious landscape, and an even more intriguing local culture put the valley on top of the list of every adventurer visiting India.

Nubra Valley in Ladakh region is cradled by sharp scree slopes, massive sand dunes, Tibetan monasteries, and rivers Shayok and Nubra cutting deep through the craggy mountains. Home to the double-hump Bactrian camel and popular as the 'land of high passes', the valley is a moonscape still largely untouched.

GETTING THERE All major airlines operate direct flights between New Delhi and Leh (162 km). The onward journey takes one through Khardung La or Wari La (depending on the choice of route), two of the world's highest motorable roads. jktourism.org



SHUTTERSTOCK



Khajuraho Madhya Pradesh

WHY VISIT? The erotic stone sculptures, inspired by the classic Hindu literature of *Kama Sutra*, here are counted amongst the finest temple art in the world.

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the temples of Khajuraho are every architecture-lover's dream. Built in the 10th century by Chandela dynasty, these group of temples are dedicated to Hindu and Jain religions, and feature awe-inspiring sculptures that deserve more than a day's time in your itinerary.

GETTING THERE Khajuraho offers air connectivity with major Indian metro cities. mptourism.com

SHUTTERSTOCK

Feast ‘n’ Fiesta

A place is best explored through its people and festivals. And in India, the festivities only get bigger! Plan your travel around these festivals for extraordinary experiences. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**

Ramadan OLD DELHI May 6-June 5

Besides the day-long fasting, the holy month of Ramadan is marked by colourful festivities and iftar parties where traditional dishes, such as kebab, biryani, *nihari* (slow-cooked meat), and *shahi tukda* (a type of dessert) are the prime highlights. Visit the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi to capture the festive mood, and later gorge on streetfood nearby.

WHERE
Jama Masjid, Old Delhi

GETTING THERE
New Delhi is connected to all major international cities by air. Old Delhi is 20 km away from the airport.



Ganga Dussehra UTTAR PRADESH June 12



According to Hindu mythology, Ganga Dussehra marks the descent of the holy River Ganga from heaven to earth. The city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh is the epicentre of festivities, where thousands of devotees take a dip in the holy river at dawn, and attend the *aarti* by the banks in the evening. Visit the Dashashwamedh Ghat to capture spectacular celebrations.

WHERE
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

GETTING THERE
There are direct flights between New Delhi and Varanasi. Take a rickshaw or tuk-tuk from main town to reach Dashashwamedh Ghat.

Saga Dawa SIKKIM June 17

The month-long festival of Saga Dawa commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha. Major celebrations take place at Tsuklakhang Palace Monastery and Rumtek Monastery in Gangtok, where monks carry out processions, and perform masked dances.

WHERE Gangtok, Sikkim

GETTING THERE Bagdogra airport in West Bengal is the nearest from Gangtok (124 km).

Sao Joao Festival GOA June 24



Monsoon in Goa is marked by the unique fertility festival of Sao Joao Feast of Saint John the Baptist. Local dances and boat races are prime highlights of the festivities.

WHERE Siolim, North Goa

GETTING THERE Goa is connected by air with major international cities. Siolim is 45 km from the airport.

Yuru Kabgyat JAMMU & KASHMIR June 29-30

This two-day festival in the Ladakh region of Jammu & Kashmir attracts Buddhists from the world over. Celebrated at the region's oldest *gompa*, Lamayuru Monastery, Yuru Kabgyat is dedicated to Yama (lord of death) and Padmasambhava (second Buddha). Monks narrate ancient tales through masked dances and plays.

WHERE
Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir

GETTING THERE
The nearest airport from the monastery is in Leh (125 km). Direct flights operate between New Delhi and Leh.



FROM LEFT: DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; GAPPER/INDIA/ALAMY; SARAH LACK/ALAMY

MARIANNA MUKUCHYAN
Celebrity Hair & Make-Up Artist

“Mumbai is both chaotic and colourful.”

When Armenian celebrity hair and make-up artist Marianna Mukuchyan first came to India on an assignment in 2013, little did she know Mumbai would soon become her home. Six years and several adventures later, she is happy exploring, shopping, and making new friends across the country. Here, she shares what made her stay in the Millennium City, and what's next on her India bucket list. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



What were your first impressions of India?
I love travelling, and it was quite an adventurous experience when I decided to come to Mumbai on a three-month work trip. I remember how I found everything so chaotic

initially. However, I fell in love with the traditional Indian wear—the colourful outfits, jewellery, and scarves. Communication was a little tough in the beginning, but it got better over time, thanks to the friendly people. Mumbai is still both, chaotic

and colourful—it's just that I have figured out how it works now.

Tell us about your adventures in India. What's been the most memorable experience?
My work takes me to so many incredible places around India. It's such a vast and versatile country; I'm not sure if I could have ever managed to see these places all by myself, and I feel really grateful that I get to travel to all these beautiful locations for my shoots. From astonishing palaces to dense jungles and even sprawling deserts, there's so much to see. I can't pick one as my favourite!

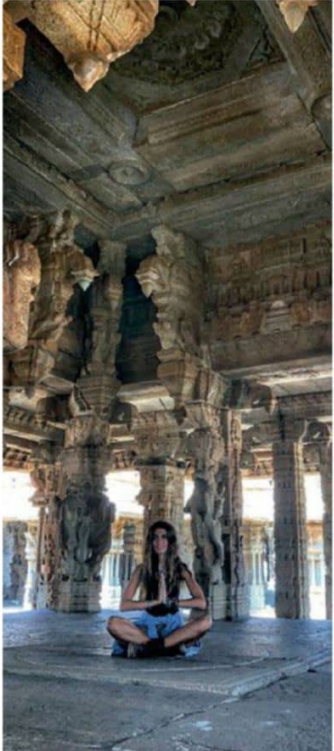
Has there ever been any unfortunate incident during your travels?
I'll be very honest, I have never felt unsafe. It's probably because I live in Mumbai, which is considered one of the safest cities for

women. But even during my travels around the country, I have, not even once, felt unsafe. I take rickshaws and taxis, and go for late night walks with absolutely no insecurities.

Top travel essentials?
Besides enough clothes for all possible occasions, I carry ample toiletries, swimwear (I never miss a chance to dip into a pool or sea!), headphones, portable speakers, neck pillow, and a shawl for long flights.

What's your advice to foreign travellers visiting India?
Be open-minded and adventurous. Try all kinds of fruits and food you come across, travel in rickshaws and trains, carry earplugs when outside to bear the honking, and be careful while crossing the roads. It's important to interact with the locals. You will be surprised how friendly everyone is. You will make friends, and be invited to their homes in no time!

“I would love to explore a yoga retreat in the Himalayas. Ladakh has also been on my bucket list for a very long time!”



From far left: Mukuchyan explores the ancient temples of Hampi; on a stroll in Kerala.



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Mandarin Body Butter, **Purearth**, ₹5,500/US\$79, purearth.asia



Sunglasses (Model 2496), **IDEA Eyewear**, ₹2,950/US\$43, idee-eyewear.com

Statement Picks

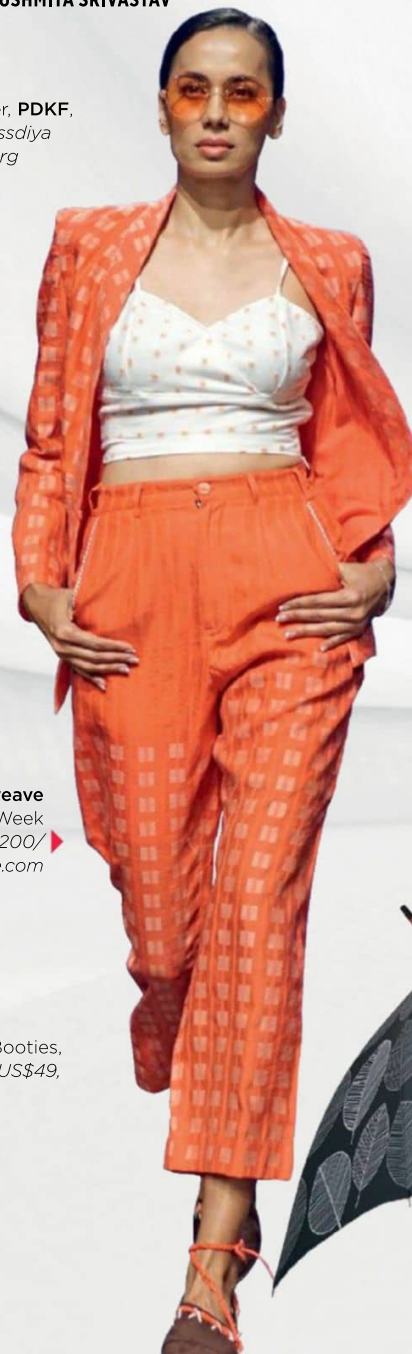
Fall back on these travel essentials from Indian labels to travel in style, and take back home a bag full of memories. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



Pink Passport Cover, **PKKF**, ₹300/US\$4, princessdiyakumarifoundation.org



Elephant Tote Bag, **PKKF**, ₹3,000/US\$43, princessdiyakumarifoundation.org



Ensemble, **Tahweave** (Lakme Fashion Week S/R '19), ₹29,200/US\$421, tahweave.com



YouthRx ph Balancing Multi Active Toner, **Lotus Herbals**, ₹345/US\$5, lotusherbals.com



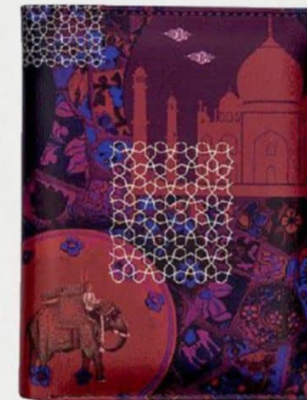
Nude Peep Toe Booties, **Catwalk**, ₹3,395/US\$49, catwalk.co.in



Monochrome Monologues Umbrella, **India Circus**, ₹799/US\$12, indiacircus.com



Great Ben 1 Watch, **Aiqon**, ₹9,450/US\$136, aiqonwatches.com



Violet Fusion Passport Cover, **India Circus**, ₹602/US\$9, indiacircus.com

Ensemble, **Abraham & Thakore** (Amazon India Fashion Week AW '18), price on request, abrahamandthakore.com



Mooch and Beard Oil, **Ustraa**, ₹999/US\$14, ustraa.com



Patent Fringed Single Monk, **The Shoe Factory**, price on request, theshoefactory.in



Chic Et Comfy

Give your wardrobe an Indian makeover this season with these A-list essentials. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



Calicut Perfume, **Bombay Perfumery**, ₹4,000/US\$58, bombayperfumery.com



Wave Multicoloured Elasticated Woven Belt, **The Tie Hub**, ₹1,195/US\$17, thetiehub.com



Ikat Black Striped Messenger Bag, **Zouk**, ₹4,399/US\$63, zouk.co.in

Brilliant Moves

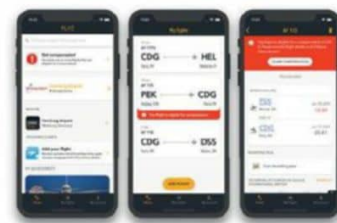
From power-packed cameras to compact smartwatches, this season is all about powerful tools for the outgoing traveller.

By **VAIBHAV SHARMA**



BRAGI - THE DASH PRO

All earbuds aren't made alike. Case in point: the new set of waterproof (1m) variant from Bragi. Special features, such as A.I. activity tracker, and ability to control playback with head gestures and support app-based real-time translation make it a steal. Manage it with Alexa for a custom audio profile. ₹29,999/US\$ 430, bragi.com



FLIO

From detailed airport maps, to locating the best coffee shops in a terminal, and crucial information on parking and transportation options—this new app's got everything covered. Moreover, it provides live flight status updates, lounge access, discount vouchers for airport shops, and guidance on claiming compensation in case your flight's been delayed.

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HUAWEI WATCH GT

Smartwatches are neat but they come with a common drawback: poor battery life. Not the new Huawei Watch GT, though. Its vibrant AMOLED display isn't just crisp, but also sips power—users can go up to two weeks between charges!

₹15,990/US\$ 230 for Sports;
₹16,990/US\$ 244 for Classic,
huawei.com

BOAT STONE 700

With a 10W power rating and 360° audio, the Boat Stone 700 portable speaker is a perfect fit for your next pool party. It's IPX6 rated, shock and dust resistant, and comes with a 2000mAh battery. The in-built Amazon Alexa is an additional feature.

₹2,799/US\$40,
boat-lifestyle.com



SALOMON SPEEDCROSS 4 GTX

For monsoon treks or evening walks in sodden neighbourhood parks, the SpeedCross 4 GTX steps up to the occasion with aplomb. It's light and waterproof, has an aggressive tread pattern for muddy trails, and comes with Gore-Tex protection. Generous cushioning makes it fit for all-day use.

₹8,000/US\$115, salomon.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BRAGI; FLIO; GOPRO; SALOMON; BOAT-LIFESTYLE; HUAWEI

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MUMBAI

Mumbai (formerly Bombay) is a city of contrasts—here, the country's most expensive real estate jostle for space with Asia's largest slum, Dharavi, and colonial-era structures rub shoulders with glitzy nightclubs. Home to the Hindi film industry, Bollywood, Mumbai is India's answer to New York City—larger-than-life icons influence the life of every *Mumbaikar* and glamorous fashion weeks set the biggest trends in the country. A gorgeous shoreline, an alluring dining and partying culture, and a soaring GDP bring dreamers to this city of million possibilities. With a population of about 18 million people and growing, the country's financial and entertainment capital is hard to miss. By PALLAVI MEHRA

Go Local

Mumbai aka the 'Maximum City' is home to India's finest restaurants and nightclubs, heritage buildings and skyscrapers, art districts and Gothic corridors.



The Gateway of India, an iconic landmark of Mumbai.

heritage tour by visiting **7 Gateway of India**, Mumbai's most iconic monument. Just around the corner is the majestic **8 Taj Mahal Palace Hotel** (tajhotels.com), the country's first harbour landmark. Thereafter, visit **9 Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to study Victorian Gothic Revival architecture. Then, make your way to the seaside promenade **10 Marine Drive**, and drive along **11 Chowpatty Beach** to **12 Haji Ali Dargah** (hajialidargah.in), a popular mosque on an islet.

CHASING ART

The **1 Kala Ghoda** district in South Mumbai is the city's eclectic art corner. Begin your art trail with the city's biggest museum, **2 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya** (csmvs.in) to study Indo-Saracenic architecture. Next up, walk across the road to the **3 National Gallery of Modern Art** (ngmaindia.gov.in) and **4 Jehangir Art Gallery** (jehangirartgallery.com) to be a part of live exhibitions. Kala Ghoda also boasts of many smaller art institutions, such as **5 Moksh Art Gallery** (mokshartonline.com) and **6 Institute of Contemporary Indian Art** (icia.in).

HERITAGE GALORE

Colonial-era architecture and design welcome visitors in South Mumbai. Start your

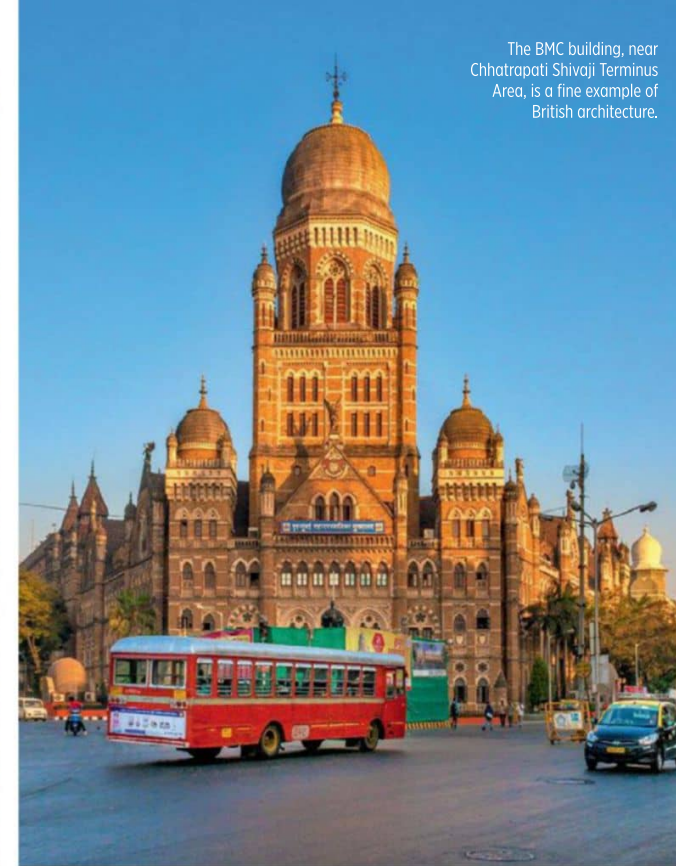
INSIDE THE LANES

13 Mahalaxmi Dhobi Ghat is Mumbai's 140-year-old open-air and human-powered laundromat. Here, hundreds of washermen wash thousands of clothes every day in 1,026 open-air troughs. To capture the best frames, walk over to the bridge across the railway tracks near Mahalaxmi train station. While you're here, try the South Indian delicacy, dosa, at the neighbouring **14 Dakshinayan South Indian Restaurant** (+91 22 23676701).

ALEX ROBINSON/GETTYIMAGES: (TOP); DARREN ROBB/GETTYIMAGES



Devotees form human pyramids as part of the festivities during Krishna Janmashthami, which is celebrated to mark the birth of Lord Krishna, usually in the months of August-September.



The BMC building, near Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Area, is a fine example of British architecture.

Distinct Identities

Mumbai, as we know today, presents a beautiful melange of cultures—Portuguese, Jews, British, Mughals—through Indo-Saracenic architecture, colourful festivals, charming synagogues, and exquisite artforms.



The Elephanta Caves (3 km from Colaba) is a popular attraction.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CR SHELARE/GETTYIMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; ANDREY KHROBOSTOV/ALAMY

Getting Around

Mumbai's notorious traffic snarls can get a bit overwhelming, especially during the monsoons. Try the famed local train or metro rail to reach different parts of the vast city. Taxis and buses are also available.



Diners' Club

From trendy rooftop lounges to Japanese izakayas, upscale Indian-fusion restaurants to iconic international eateries—Mumbai has a dining destination for every mood.



NEW ADDITIONS

Among the most awaited restaurant openings this year, **15 Ministry of Crab (MOC)**'s Mumbai outlet serves the best seafood in the city. The menu includes classic dishes like avocado crab salad, clay pot prawn curry, and garlic chilli crab. Starts from ₹5,000/US\$70 for two, ministryofcrab.com

ITALIAN DREAM

Located in Marine Drive, **16 Vetro and Enoteca** at **The Oberoi, Mumbai** is where Italian food-lovers and wine connoisseurs meet for exquisite meals. Pizza 'tartufo,' lamb pappardelle, and gnocchi with burrata are highly recommended. Starts from ₹5,000/US\$71 for two, oberoihotels.com

VEG DELIGHT

Founded over 50 years ago, **17 Swati Snacks** is a popular restaurant serving Indian regional cuisine and Mumbai's street food in a lovely setting. Try the famous *panki chatni*, *sev puri* and *dal dhokli* at any of their two locations in the city. Starts at ₹1,500/US\$22 for two, swatisnacks.com

Clockwise from left: Ministry of Crab was launched in February; a serving of *papri chaat*, a local snack.

ROYAL TREAT

The award-winning **18 ITC Dum Pukht** has an old-world charm, and offers scrumptious cuisine of the Awadhi Nawabs—the former royals of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The signature dishes of *biryani*, *kakori* kebab, and *shahi nehari* are slow-cooked for hours for an authentic taste and aroma. Starts at ₹5,000/US\$71 for two, itshotels.in

ALL THE WAY FROM JAPAN

19 Wasabi by Morimoto at **Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai** is an institution in itself. White fish carpaccio, black cod miso, and wasabi crème brulee are top performers. Starts from ₹12,000/US\$170 for two, tajhotels.com

Mix 'n' Match

Vibrant street markets and glitzy malls feature in every Mumbai fashionista's style guide.

STREET SMART

The tiny shops in **20 Colaba Causeway** in the heart of South Mumbai sell everything—from silver jewellery to shawls and cheap souvenirs. Shop for chunky earrings or Kolhapuri *chappals* from the stall outside Leopold Café. The Bombay Store (thebombaystore.com) on **21 Linking Road** in **22 Bandra** is the best place to shop artifacts and accessories.

RETAIL THERAPY

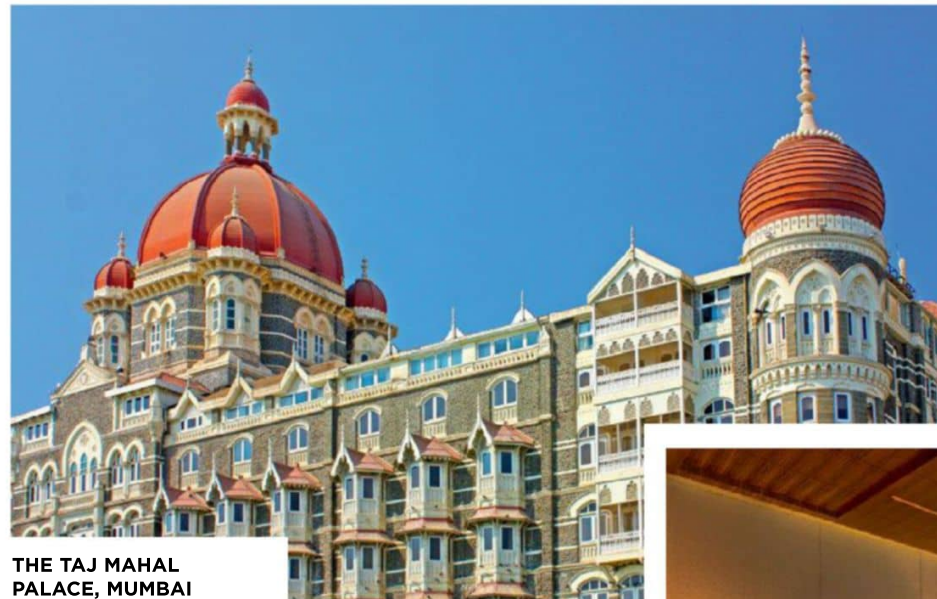
23 Palladium Mall in Lower Parel showcases the affluent side of Mumbai's fashion world. From international luxury brands—such as Jimmy Choo and Gucci, to boutique Indian labels such as Anita Dongre (anitadongre.com), Amrapali Jewels (amrapalijewels.com), and Masaba (houseofmasaba.net)—find everything under one roof, palladiummumbai.com



Colaba is home to chic boutiques and streetside stalls.

Best City Hotels

From majestic palace hotels to international members-only boutique clubs—Mumbai offers an enviable range of options.



THE TAJ MAHAL PALACE, MUMBAI

This palace hotel is situated in the heart of Mumbai, overlooking the Gateway of India and the Arabian Sea. Each of the 543 rooms combines the charm of a bygone era with modern amenities. The hotel has played host to kings, presidents, and other global dignitaries. Its dining spaces offer a wide range of cuisines, including Mediterranean and Japanese.

Address

Apollo Bandar, Colaba; starts from ₹23,000/US\$331, tajhotels.com

21 THE ST. REGIS MUMBAI

Owing to its central location, St. Regis Mumbai is one of the most popular hotels in Mumbai, offering views of the city's skyline and the Arabian Sea from each of its 395 rooms and suites. The highest Asian restaurant in India, By the Mekong, blends Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese flavours for a delightful epicurean experience.

Address

462, Tulsi Pipe Rd, Lower Parel; starts from ₹12,500/US\$180, marriott.com

25 GRAND HYATT MUMBAI

Spread across 12 acres of verdant gardens, the hotel offers 110 serviced apartments besides 547 well-appointed rooms and suites. The multi-dimensional lifestyle complex also features wellness facilities, two outdoor pools, and a dedicated 24-hour concierge service. Its Sunday Brunch, also known as The Grand Brunch, is popular among the city's well-heeled diners, and features signature dishes from all its restaurants.

Address

Bandra Kurla Complex Vicinity, Santacruz East; starts from ₹9,026/US\$130, hyatt.com



26 THE PARK HOTEL, NAVI MUMBAI

Located amidst lush greenery, this 80-room luxury boutique hotel boasts an extraordinary design vocabulary. A 45-minute drive from the airport, the property sits pretty on the city's outskirts and makes for a quiet retreat from the

crowded streets. Art installations inspired by local themes are strewn across the property. The in-house retail outlet also offers shopping options.

Address

No 1, Sector 10, CBD Belapur, Navi Mumbai; starts from ₹4,721/US\$68, theparkhotels.com



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK(2); COURTESY OF GRAND HYATT MUMBAI; THE PARK HOTEL, NAVI MUMBAI

SHUTTERSTOCK

KOCHI

Over 600 years ago, a great flood carved out a sliver of land from the southernmost state of India, leaving open a port for traders, merchants and explorers from around the world.

The Chinese, Arab, and Jews came in droves to trade in pepper, cardamom, and other spices for the price of gold. A city born in storm, Kochi thus, became the stronghold of the spice trade in India and prospered for centuries to come. It was also here that the imperialists—the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch, and the English—first arrived and began the colonisation of India. This intriguing medley of influences left their lasting impressions on the heritage, architecture, culture, and way of life of the people, moulding Kochi into what it is today—quirky, charming, and an absolute delight to explore.

By **SATARUPA PAUL**



Chinese fish-nets have become emblematic of Kochi's identity.

Tap the Pulse

History thrives in the lanes of Kochi, and presents itself through interesting architectural influences, while a modern metropolis rises high across the breathtaking backwaters.



JEWISH CONNECTION
The 1568-built **1 Paradesi Synagogue** still stands tall in **2 Jew Town**, featuring ornate brass bema, coloured-glass lamps, hand-painted Cantonese floor tiles, and magnificent Belgian chandeliers. The narrow colourful lanes of Jew Town today are lined with antique and handicraft shops.

COLONIAL KOCHI
In 1497, the famous Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived at the

Malabar coast, set up a trading post, and built a fort and a settlement around it, which today stands as the charming neighbourhood of **3 Fort Kochi**. Here, you'll find the **4 St. Francis Church**—the first European church in India. After 160 years, Fort Kochi was captured by the Dutch, who rebuilt the famous **5 Dutch Palace** (Mattancherry Palace), and then 112 years later, the British took over, and restored a 16th-century



An art installation at the Kochi Muziris Biennale.

Left: One of the antique shops at Jew Town.
Below: an Ayurveda massage is among the top draws of Kochi.



Portuguese church into the imposing neoclassical Santa Cruz Basilica.

ART TRAIL
India's largest contemporary art event and an exhibition of international repute, **Kochi Muziris Biennale** (kochimuzirisbiennale.org) is held in spaces across Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, and Durbar Hall in Ernakulum. **6 Kerala Folklore Museum** (keralafolkloremuseum.org) is housed in a typical Kerala-style building and displays artifacts, such as masks, costumes, musical instruments, traditional jewellery and more. The **7 Kerala Kathakali Centre** (kathakalicentre.com) in Fort Kochi is the most

popular venue to watch traditional classical dance forms, such as Kathakali and Mohiniattam, as well as the incredibly skilled martial art form, *Kalaripayattu*.

SOUL TREATMENT
Home to the traditional Ayurveda treatments, Kochi is dotted with massage centres offering a range of services that benefit the body and mind, such as *Abhyanga*, *Shirodhara*, *Nasyam*, *Pizhichil*, and *Kizhi*. **8 Ayurveda** (ayurveda.com), **9 Agastya Ayurveda** (agastyaayurveda.in), and **10 Ayurveda Sanctum** (ayurvedasancum.co.in) are a few of the highly-rated traditional massage centres.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HEMIS/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK (2)



The traditional art form of Kathakali narrates tales from Hindu mythology.

Cultural Potpourri

Languid backwaters, immersive art discoveries, Dutch and Jew influences, which go beyond architecture, and an age-old school of medicine—Kochi is a revelation for every traveller who arrives at its shores.



The traditional snake boat race in Vembanad Lake is one of the biggest attractions of Kochi during monsoons.



One of Kerala's earliest martial art forms, *Kalaripayattu* involves a display of fierce whirlwind movement of weapons.

Getting Around

Taxis and autorickshaws are the most convenient modes of transport to travel around the city. Kochi has an excellent public bus network, whereas the two-year-old metro system connects a few main areas in the mainland.



All distances are calculated from the airport.

ILLUSTRATED BY LAKEER INDIA. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE, FROM RIGHT: SPFH/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

Culinary Stops

Kochi's culinary scene is a heady mix of indigenous flavours and foreign influences.

CREATIVE CORNER

Located off the maze of quirky antique shops of Jew Town is **11 Kashi Art Café**, which doubles up as an art gallery and artist residency. This fashionable space has a Zen-like vibe, with a vertical garden, wooden tables spread out in a shaded courtyard, and plants and contemporary artworks casually sprinkled around. Home-baked cakes, French toasts, and sandwiches complement the strong, organic coffee served here. Starts from ₹700/US\$10, kashiartgallery.com

FINE DINE WITH A VIEW

Designed in the style of a traditional *kettuvalam* boat, **12 Rice Boat** offers the best seafood in a fine dining setup in Kochi. Housed in the premises of the **Taj Malabar Resort & Spa** on Willingdon Island, the restaurant affords splendid views of the backwaters and the historic Mattancherry

town to its diners. Signature dishes made from fresh catch include tiger prawns in coconut oil, white snapper in banana leaf, and lobster bisque. Starts from ₹3,500/US\$50, tajhotels.com

LOCAL TASTE

In the midst of a beautiful Portuguese courtyard, stands Malabar Junction, one of the prime places in the city to try local delicacies. It offers dishes made of locally sourced ingredients, with flavours that borrow from the land and the sea. Beside a range of authentic preparations, their speciality includes a degustation menu of local dishes, such as fish *pollichathu*, *varutharacha koon* curry, and payasam. Starts from ₹2,500/US\$36, malabarescapes.com

SHAKEN & STIRRED

An elegant lounge housed in the premises of **The Avenue Regent** hotel, **18 Mezzo**

is often packed with evening revellers—both tourists and locals. Warm hardwood floors, and comfortable couches in white and silver add to the inviting interiors. An array of European and oriental dishes complement a selection of wines, even as you engage in easy banter with your company. Starts from ₹1,500/US\$22, theavenuregent.com



From above: An art installation at the Kashi Art Café; a traditional Kerala thali.



Where to Shop

From treasured antiques to spices and saris, Kochi is a shopper's dream.



Shop for spices in the Mattancherry market.

ANTIQUES & HANDICRAFTS

Jew Town is a hub of shops selling antiques, handicrafts and local art works. **14 Crafters** (crafters.in) offers antique household items, such as carved doors, metal knockers, and bronze *urulis*, whereas **15 Heritage Arts** (heritageartscochin.com) is a beautiful store that houses a snake boat, family heirlooms, and planters' chairs. The **16 Ethnic Passage** (Jew Town, Kappalandimukku, Mattancherry) sells antiques and furniture as well as clothing and jewellery.

SARIS & JEWELLERY

17 Jayalakshmi Silks (jayalakshmisilks.com) is one of the largest textile stores in Kochi, whereas **18 Seematti** (seematti.com) is a favourite

for embroidered saris in silk. Both the stores sell Kerala *kasavu* saris and *mundus* in pure gold zari. **19 Bhima Jewellers** (bhima.com) is known for recreating classic designs, while **20 Alapatt Jewels** (alapattjewels.com) handcrafts traditional designs in platinum, gold, and silver.

SPICES

One cannot possibly visit Kochi, and leave without buying a sample of the spices. The **21 Mattancherry Spice Market** is lined with centuries-old shops selling pepper, cinnamon, bay leaves, and other spices. The government-owned **22 Spices Board** (indianspices.com) in Palarivattom, retails organic spices, spice mixes as well as essential oils.

Best City Hotels

From grand heritage properties to sprawling waterfront resorts, Kochi offers luxurious retreats across preferences and budgets.



23 GRAND HYATT KOCHI BOLGATTY

A sprawling resort overlooking the Vembanad Lake, the largest hotel in Kerala is spread over 26 acres of land on the Bolgatty Island. It offers 264 rooms with lake or city views, including 38 suites and four villas with private plunge pools. The resort occupies almost the entire island, with the historic Bolgatty Palace a short walk away from its back gate.

Address

Mulavukad, Bolgatty Island; starts from ₹9,000/US\$130, hyatt.com

24 NOVOTEL KOCHI INFOPARK

Located in the city's business district, the hotel boasts of 128 rooms and suites, three meeting halls, a rooftop infinity pool, and a striking façade that is hard to miss. The Sundek Bar offers panoramic views of Kochi's skyline. From heritage walks to exploring the backwaters and shopping *kasavu* saris, the staff goes an extra mile to curate bespoke experiences.

Address

Infopark Rd, Kakkanad, Kochi; starts from ₹4,319/US\$62, accorhotels.com



26 FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON KOCHI INFOPARK

Among the top business hotels in Kochi, Four Points by Sheraton Kochi Infopark has 218 luxury rooms and suites. Multiple conference spaces, a sound-proof ballroom, and a 24-hour business centre make

it ideal for business travellers. All Spice, the dining destination here is famous for its breezy vibe, and coastal delights.

Address

Infopark Kochi Phase 1 Campus, Kakkanad, Kochi; starts from ₹4,650/US\$67, marriott.com

25 FORTE KOCHI

A medley of Portuguese, Dutch, and British influences, this 1860s mansion was once home to a Jew family. Today, it is a chic boutique hotel with 27 heritage-inspired luxe rooms. Its proximity to major city attractions makes it a front runner among the heritage addresses in Fort Kochi. The mango-yellow edifice, and installation of a *mikva* (a bath for Jewish rituals) make it stand out. Our Lady of Hope Church and Mattanchery Palace are just a ferry ride away.

Address

1/373, Princess Street, Fort Kochi; starts from ₹7,500/US\$108, fortekochi.in

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF GRAND HYATT KOCHI BOLGATTY; FORTE KOCHI; FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON KOCHI INFOPARK; NOVOTEL KOCHI INFOPARK



Hours in VARANASI

The world's oldest living city, Varanasi, enchants and surprises its visitors in the same breath. Find out how to explore this ancient, multi-layered city in a day's time. By **GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI**



5.30 am

ATTEND THE GANGA AARTI

The hour-long *Subah-e-Benaras aarti* on the Assi Ghat gently nudges the sleeping city awake. See a row of richly garbed priests swirling lit snake-hood lamps to the sonorous chanting of Vedic *shlokas* (verses) that waft heavenward as the sun rises over the holy River Ganga.



7.30 am

SAIL THROUGH THE GANGA

In Varanasi, life revolves around the ghats (flight of steps leading down to a river). Get on a boat to watch the 80 ghats abuzz with activity: meditating orange-robed sadhus, kids and adults bathing in the river; women washing saris even as pundits perform sacred ceremonies. Or, capture the numerous temples and palaces that line these ghats on camera.

SHUTTERSTOCK(2)



8.30 am

WATCH A GAME OF MUD-WRESTLING

Walk along the serpentine lanes near the Tulsi Ghat to arrive at Tulsi Akhada, where young men wrestle under the watchful gaze of their master. One of the oldest known *akhadas*, it was started by Goswami Tulsidas, who wrote the Hindi version of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*.

11.00 am
VISIT THE ICONIC KASHI VISHWANATH TEMPLE

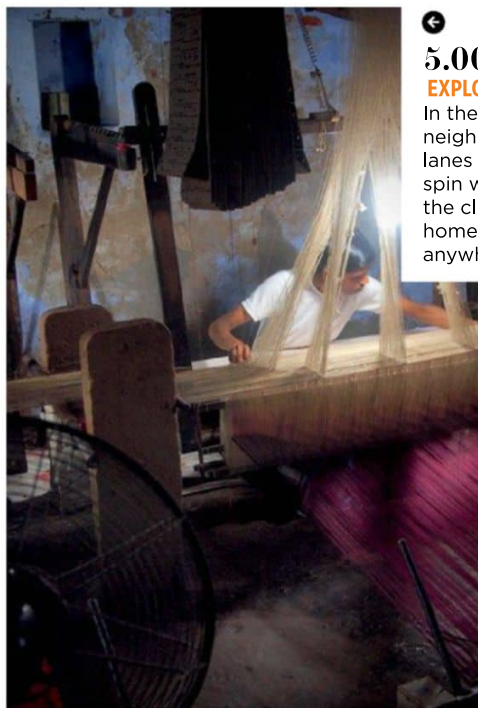
One of the 12 *pyotirlinga* temples (shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva), the Kashi Vishwanath Temple is the most popular attraction in Varanasi. Rebuilt over the centuries, it features 800 kg of gold plating on the tower and dome. The temple shares its walls with a mosque, and has been an icon of communal harmony.



9.00 am

ENJOY A DESI BREAKFAST

Varanasi is famous for its chaat (snacks). Hop into an auto-rickshaw and stop for a traditional breakfast at one of the streetside joints in Thatheri Bazaar. Devour aloo kachori (a spicy, potato-stuffed pastry), coupled with a dash of spicy and sweet chutney. Round it off with hot jalebis (curls of fried batter) or kulfi, a traditional Indian ice cream.



5.00 pm

EXPLORE THE WEAVERS' DISTRICT

In the atmospheric weavers' colony in the Pilikothi neighbourhood, one has to navigate noodle-thin lanes alongside ambling goats and cows. Weavers spin webs of magic—rich Benarasi silk saris—against the clickety-clack soundtrack of looms in cramped homes. Saris produced by these weavers fetch anywhere up to ₹2 lakh/US\$2,880 in the market.

6.00 pm

ATTEND THE EVENING AARTI

Head for the Dasashwamedh Ghat, located fairly close to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, to watch a row of young priests in silk saffron-coloured *kurtis* and white *dhotis* perform the 45-minute-long *aarti*, twirling lit lamps in superb synchrony. The boats bobbing on the water with camera-festooned tourists resemble beached ghost ships.



3.00 pm

BUY THE FAMOUS BENARASI SARI

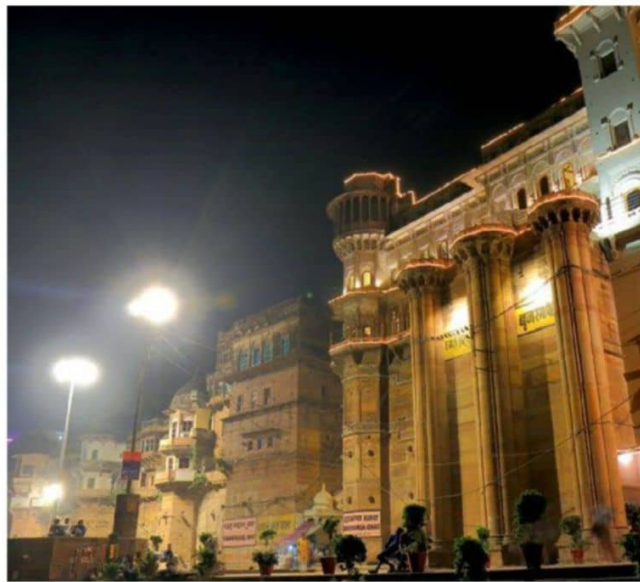
Among the finest saris in India, Benarasi sari is known for its gold and silver brocade, fine silk, and opulent embroidery. Visit Deendayal Hastkala Sankul (*Badalapur, Lamhi, Varanasi*), a trade facilitation centre for handicrafts, and shop souvenirs. Or, navigate through the labyrinthine lanes of Chowk to get a good bargain with any of the wholesale dealers.



1.00 pm

EAT, SHOP, REPEAT

Refuel at Open Hand Café & Store (*openhands.in*) with a light meal (sandwiches, salads and pastas), delicious coffee and baked goodies. Browse the shop for custom-made garments, household linen, and leather and canvas merchandise. Or, stop at a local store to shop for brass and silverware.



9.00 pm

DINE AT A PALACE RESTAURANT

Bring on the night in the 19th-century Brijrama Palace whose sandstone walls are cantilevered over the Darbhanga Ghat and the glimmering Ganga. In the elegant frescoed confines of its multi-cuisine vegetarian restaurant, Darbhanga, savour a Benarasi thali or Indian, Chinese, Italian or Thai delicacies. Later, taste the Benarasi paan (betel leaves used as stimulant) for a truly local experience.



8.00 pm

SIP ON SOME BLUE LASSI

In the heart of the old city, plug some creamy Benarasi lassi (a yogurt-based thirst quencher). You'll be hard-pressed to find a better place to taste lassi than the century-old Blue Lassi (*CK 12/1 Kunj Gali, Kachaudi Gali*), a minuscule outlet near the Manikarnika Ghat (The 'Burning Ghat' where the dead are cremated). On offer here are different unparalleled flavours of Benarasi lassi—from mango to pineapple.



GETTING THERE

All major airlines offer connectivity between New Delhi and Varanasi.



STAY

The Brijrama Palace is a heritage hotel on the Darbhanga Ghat (₹26,500/US\$385, *brijrama.com*). Taj Nadesar Palace Varanasi offers luxe accommodation amidst mango orchards (₹40,000/US\$575, *tajhotels.com*).



WHEN

Varanasi gets tourists year round. However, it is best to visit during the winter months (November to March).



MUST-SEE

There are numerous temples on every street in Varanasi. However, a visit to the popular 18th-century Durga temple, Annapurna Temple, and Kal Bhairav temple is highly recommended. The 17th-century Ramnagar Fort houses a museum with an eclectic collection of American vintage cars, jewel-studded sedan chairs, and a weaponry section. About 10 km away is the holy city of Sarnath where Lord Buddha is believed to have given his first sermon after he attained enlightenment.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY; BOAZ ROTTEM/ALAMY; NOVARC IMAGES/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROBIN HEDGES/ALAMY; CECILIA COLUSSI/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK



DI: Why did you set up the Princess Diya Kumari Foundation (PDKF)?

Princess Diya Kumari: PDKF is a non-profit organisation founded in 2013. Over the last one year, it has been established as a functional and sustainable organisation. I've always felt the need to give back to the society, and my parents [Late Sawai Bhawani Singhji and Padmini Devi] taught me the importance of helping those in need. In Rajasthan, there are many cultural, social, and economic barriers faced by women. I felt the need for a collective effort to improve the lives of these women who might not have had an opportunity to pursue education due to early marriage or financial constraints.

DI: What measures do you take to promote PDKF among foreign tourists?

PDK: We promote PDKF as an organisation when we travel to international destinations. Also, my son, HH Maharaja Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur, helps me promote the Foundation. Even social media has helped [spread



the word] about PDKF. We have had people from all over the world who see our products on Instagram [[@princessdiyakumarifoundation](#)] and reach out to us. Foreign tourists visit the Foundation at Badal Mahal [near Jai Niwas Garden in Jaipur], where we give them an insight into heritage crafts of Rajasthan.

Anti-clockwise from above: The members of PDKF with Princess Diya Kumari, President, and Shivina Kumari, Hon. Advisor and Trustee (in blue sari); *potli* and cosmetic bags, prepared by PDKF, are inspired by local motifs; handicraft products by PDKF on display at a stall.

DI: What are the main areas that the Foundation focusses on?

PDK: Our main focus areas are skill building and livelihoods, promoting heritage crafts, supporting education for girls, women's empowerment, and facilitating health programmes. We have a team that's led by our trustee comprising administrative officers and supervisors at our three centres. We have over 80 women who regularly come to our centres.

Our day-to-day function is varied, every week we have visitors from all over the world who come to visit our

Foundation, and interact with our staff. We have volunteers from Europe, and even Australia, who come to learn about Rajasthan, its culture and heritage crafts. The daily operations include providing training, infrastructure, design, materials, and guidance to the women who come to our centres. We support their livelihoods, provide a safe environment, and empower them to feel confident about themselves. We also conduct outreach activities, such as free health camps.

DI: How is PDKF making an impact to support women's empowerment?

PDK: We have empowered women financially by helping them learn skills that can provide them livelihood.



India Shining

The India story would be incomplete without highlighting the people and organisations, which drive the growth of the country, and are instrumental in finding a place on the global map. The Princess Diya Kumari Foundation, an NGO responsible for the development of Rajasthan's underprivileged women, is one such example. *Discover India* caught up with its president and founder, **Princess Diya Kumari** of the Jaipur Royal Family, to find the grassroot-level functions and what is it about PDKF that attracts visitors from around the world.

By **AINDRILA MITRA** Photographed by **LODOVICO COLLI DI FELIZZANO** [@iodoclick](#)



CONTACT DETAILS

Princess Diya Kumari Foundation,
Badal Mahal, Near Jai Niwas Garden
& Govind Devji Temple, Jaipur;
princessdiyakumarifoundation.org or
email at pdinfo@gmail.com

I believe financial inclusion for women is very important. We have assisted our members in opening their own bank accounts, so they can control their finances. In addition, we help connect them to various government schemes.

DI: What are PDKF's signature products, and what's the creative process behind making them?

PDK: We develop contemporary designs using techniques that are traditional, and we try to include multiple techniques on each product [to be able to assign work to as many women as possible].

DI: How are PDKF's products priced?

PDK: We make products in two categories. The first category caters to tourists who are looking for souvenirs, such as key chains, soft toys, coasters, fabric necklaces, and bags in the price range of ₹150-₹1,000/US\$2-US\$15. We also make

Above: Local women at a PDKF centre in Jaipur. *Left:* An old woman working on a coin bag.

garments, such as children's clothes, quilted jackets, *lehengas* (ethnic long skirts), embroidered scarves, shawls and saris in the range of ₹1,000-₹10,000/US\$15-US\$145.

DI: As a Jaipur royalty, does your family lineage help you with your work?

PDK: I am able to support PDKF in various ways; we have a PDKF stall and a store at City Palace, Jaipur where we sell the products made by our ladies. Plus, we look at taking part in various exhibitions, trade shows and events that benefit the Foundation.

DI: What are your personal favourites from PDKF's range of products?

PDK: I love wearing some of the saris made by PDKF, using embroidery techniques, such as *zardozi* and *gota patti*. 



Top 10 Hotels in JAIPUR

A heady mix of the old and the new, Rajasthan's flamboyant capital, Jaipur, caters to every kind of traveller—from young couples to multi-generational families—with its exquisite collection of hotels and resorts. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



Taj Rambagh Palace

Enjoy uninterrupted views of the Aravallis from each room.

This 1835-built palace was first a home of the Queen's favourite handmaiden. Then, it was turned into a royal guesthouse, and later into the opulent residence of Jaipur royalty, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II and his wife, Maharani Gayatri Devi. Today, the Taj Rambagh Palace stands tall amongst Rajasthan's choicest luxury hotels. With its manicured gardens, sprawling courtyards, and cenotaphs, the palace has managed to retain its splendour through the years. With Birla Mandir and Albert Hall Museum close by, it features 78 rooms and suites that are works of art—think four-poster beds, walk-in wardrobes, textured drapes, crystal chandeliers, and windows opening to the views of the Aravalli hills. Experience Rajasthani hospitality at Suvarna Mahal, the 18th-century dining room, and relish an authentic Indian feast. Or, ask the hotel concierge for a private dinner under the stars in the palace gardens.

Starts from ₹25,700/US\$368,
tajhotels.com



The Oberoi Rajvilas

Raj Mahal serves Indian fare in a magical outdoor setting.

Ranked among top hotels in the *Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards 2018* list, The Oberoi Rajvilas is considered the epitome of Indian hospitality. It features premier rooms, luxury tents, and villas with private pools in a fort-like setting. The dining destinations are equally unique—while ornate chandeliers welcome guests at Surya Mahal; Raj Mahal charms visitors with its al fresco setting; and the Rajwada Library Bar is the place to enjoy your nightcap. Bespoke experiences, such as a cooking session with the chef, a morning walk followed by a scrumptious breakfast in the Herb Garden, and a wine tasting session, make the stay memorable. The Oberoi Spa offers a mix of Ayurvedic and western therapies.

Starts from ₹28,500/US\$408,
oberoihotels.com





Fairmont Jaipur

Top tourist attractions are minutes away.

Inspired by the rich heritage of Rajasthan, Fairmont Jaipur's intricate design transports you to the opulent era of the Maharajas. The imposing palatial edifice resembles an impregnable fortress of yore, and is a true blend of Mughal and Rajputana architecture. Silk drapes on windows, four-poster beds, alcoves with *tikri* glasswork, and detailed embellishing—Fairmont Jaipur showcases a seamless synergy of traditional decor and modern facilities. There are 199 rooms and suites, many of which overlook the majestic Aravalli hills. Local attractions, such as Nahargarh Fort and Jal Mahal, are minutes away from the property. Apart from the all-day dining space, Zoya, and the fusion restaurant, Zarin, there's Aza—the regal library bar meant for relaxed evenings.

Starts from ₹10,500/US\$150, fairmont.com



Trident, Jaipur

The signature Trident Kids' Club is the star attraction.

Opposite the magnificent Jal Mahal sits the Trident, Jaipur, offering sweeping views of the Mansagar Lake. A total of 132 well-appointed rooms and suites with *jharokhas* and balconies are well-lit, airy, and adorned with antiques. Inspired by the cultural heritage of Jaipur, the rooms blend convenience with classic charm. Wake up to stunning views and a sumptuous breakfast spread for a heady start to your day. Visit Jal Mahal restaurant for

Rajasthani fine dining; Grills By The Pool for lipsmacking grills alongside *Kalbela* dance performances; and the bar, Mansagar. With the Trident Kids' Club, a private play area for children and baby sitter service are available on call. A wide selection of treatments are on offer at the Trident Spa. Local attractions, Jaigarh Fort and Amber Palace are also nearby.

Starts from ₹5,300/US\$75, tridenthotels.com



Hilton Jaipur

Top luxury address in the city for business travellers.

Overlooking the Nahargarh Fort, Hilton Jaipur beautifully blends modern design with traditional hospitality. Just 20 minutes from the Jaipur International Airport, the hotel is a preferred destination among business travellers—thanks to its dedicated club floor with executive rooms and a private business lounge. The exquisite dining destinations, Chaandi and Aurum, serve Indian cuisine as well as Continental spreads. Guests love to unwind at the rooftop lounge, Signature, and the bar, Krystal, after a day spent out touring the city. The vast azure pool dotted with gazebos and loungers call for a swim, while the in-house spa 'Eau de Vie' by ZIVAYA ensures rejuvenating sessions of Indian and Asian therapies. There is also a dedicated kids' club and connecting rooms for families that make sure the parents get to have a watchful eye on their kids while enjoying time on their own.

Starts from ₹5,249/US\$75, hilton.com

COURTESY OF HILTON JAIPUR; (TOP) FAIRMONT JAIPUR



ITC Rajputana, Jaipur

Local attractions Jal Bhawan and Albert Hall Museum are located nearby.



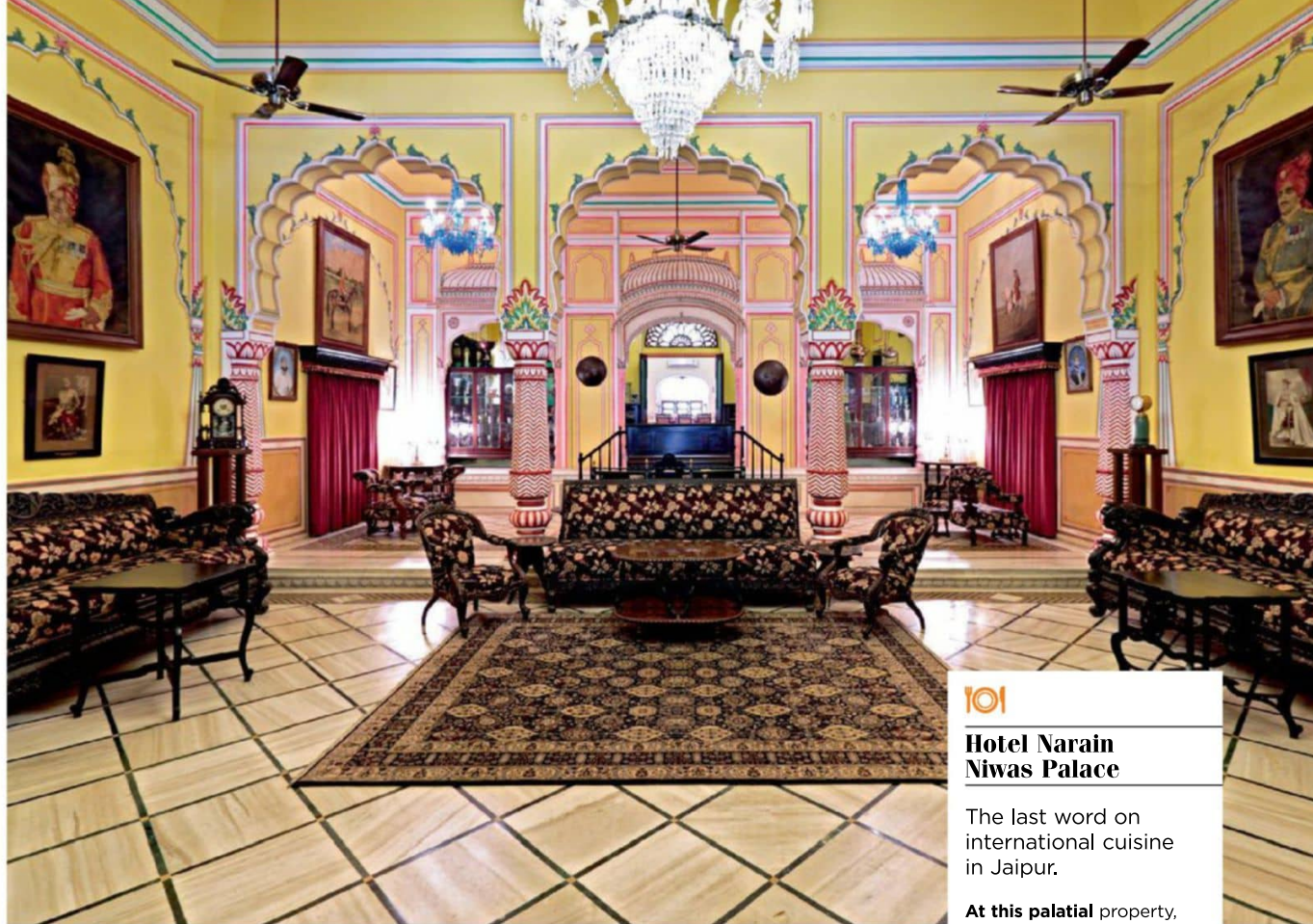
ITC Rajputana is a stunning property—think high ceilings with chandeliers, lobby with freehand wall murals, paisley designs on white walls, lotus-shaped fountain, and upholstered furniture. Expect to be spoilt by a personal butler, who takes care of your every need during

the stay, including keeping the kids entertained while you and your partner indulge in relaxing spa treatments at Kaya Kalp. An outdoor swimming pool, a shopping arcade, and several dining options make sure there's never a dull moment. While the restaurant, Jal Mahal, offers authentic

Rajasthani fare, Sheesh Mahal serves choicest liquors and cocktails. The other dining destinations, Peshawari and Jaipur Pavilion, are equally popular for grills and global cuisine, respectively.

Starts from ₹6,500/US\$93, itchehoteis.in

COURTESY OF ITC RAJPUTANA, JAIPUR; (TOP) HOTEL NARAIN NIWAS PALACE



Hotel Narain Niwas Palace

The last word on international cuisine in Jaipur.

At this palatial property, guests share space with the royal family. Designed in an Anglo-Indian style, the palace once served as the country resort for the Kanota royalty, and is one of the best heritage hotels in the city today. The property with a mango-yellow façade, lush lawns flocked by peacocks and parrots, and numerous shopping destinations offers many exciting aspects. However, it's the Bar Palladio, which has more takers. Designed by Dutch designer Marie-Anne Oudejans, the place combines Italian flare with Mughal design in its tented canopies. Look no further for international fare as this place is known for its Italian preparations. Next to it is Shikaar Bagh—the new resto-bar that takes you back to bygone hunting days.

Starts from ₹6,000/US\$86, hotelnarainniwas.com



Samode Haveli

City Palace and Amber Palace are nearby.

This 175-year-old boutique hotel is an urban oasis with strong architectural elements of Rajasthan's design culture. Colourful frescoes, mosaic floors, dramatic archways adorned with velvet drapes, and teak furniture set the mood for an opulent stay. The place is constructed across various levels and bears an Indo-Saracenic vibe. The residences of the former royal occupants have been thoughtfully transformed into 39 deluxe rooms and suites, each having a unique design and interior. Room 115, referred to as *Sheesh Mahal* (glass palace), has stunning murals and mirrorwork that go back to the 18th-century. The outdoor pool is one of the finest in the city, with a bar next to it, and a well-appointed gym above. Rajasthani dishes dominate the menu at the dining hall, but you will also find some great European picks of your choice.

Starts from ₹6,900/US\$99,
samode.com



Clarks Amer

Jaipur International Airport is a 10-minute drive from the hotel.

Arrive at this spectacular mansion in white to be welcomed by manicured gardens. Boasting 214 well-appointed rooms, Clarks Amer is one of the founder members of the Jaipur Virasat Festival (jaipurvirasatfoundation.org) that encourages local artists, and a preferred venue for the famed Jaipur Literature Fest (jaipurliteraturefestival.org). Best known for its eclectic restaurants, the hotel has Durbar, the dining hall for North Indian and Continental cuisines; Dholamaru, the fine dining Rajasthani restaurant; ta BLU, the

rooftop café and bar with amazing views; and Zolocrust, the 24x7 live bakery and patisserie. With its spacious conference and banquet halls, it is just the right place to head for conferences, and family gatherings. Allow the warm staff to line up bespoke itineraries curated as per your interests—the team's unmatched dedication to provide a smooth stay for the guests makes it one of the best five-star hotels here.

Starts from ₹4,800/US\$69, hotelclarks.com



Shahpura House

Great views of Amber Palace complement meals at Rang Mahal restaurant.

Carefully-restored to its original glory, Shahpura House narrates the tale of its regal inheritance through intricate design, featuring an iconic façade, walls adorned with traditional Shekhawati murals, and carved marble inlay. Inside the rooms, swords and shields pay tribute to the state's legacy of producing iconic warriors. While the Sapphire restaurant dishes up continental delights, Rang Mahal is the place to enjoy food with a view. Save the rooftop restaurant, Rasa, for evenings and enjoy a cultural show of folk dances and puppetry along with an authentic Rajasthani fare. Take back home local handicrafts and antiques selling at the in-house souvenir shop.

Starts from ₹2,660/US\$38, shahpura.com

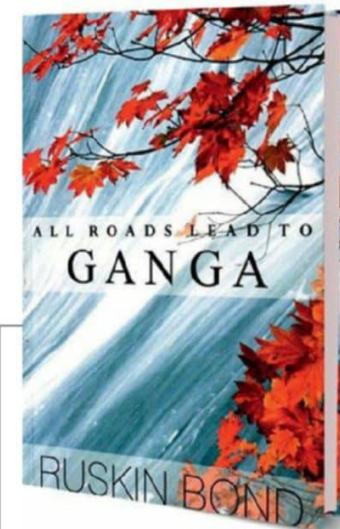
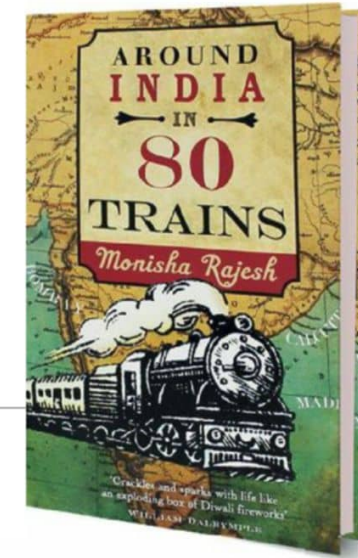


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF CLARKS AMER; SHAHPURA HOUSE; SAMODE HAVELI

THROUGH THE PAGES

Prepare yourself to experience India in and out through these insightful reads.

By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



ALL ROADS LEAD TO GANGA
Ruskin Bond

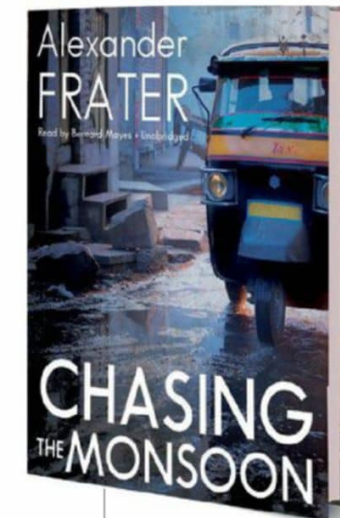
This fascinating travel memoir of noted writer, Ruskin Bond takes you to the origin of the holy River Ganges in the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttarakhand. From there, starts a poetic voyage through the misty valleys, wild woodlands, and the numerous shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri.

PRICE ₹195/US\$3
WHERE TO BUY
flipkart.com

AROUND INDIA IN 80 TRAINS
Monisha Rajesh

Wry, witty, and brimming with adventures, Monisha Rajesh's debut book takes readers through her train journeys, traversing 40,000 km along the length and breadth of the country in a nostalgic memoir. On the way, she discovers different places, people, culture, and food.

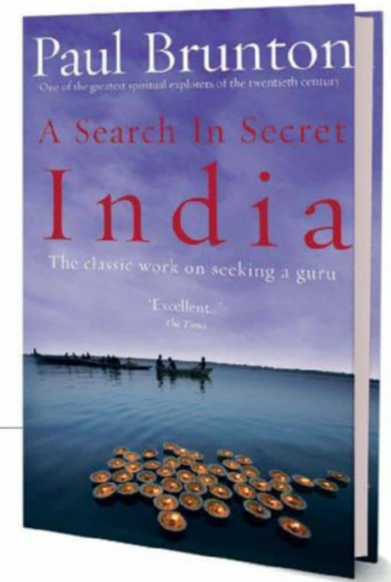
PRICE ₹316/US\$4.5
WHERE TO BUY
fullcirclebooks.in



CHASING THE MONSOON: A MODERN PILGRIMAGE THROUGH INDIA
Alexander Frater

Trailing the wayward nimbus clouds, Alexander Frater flew to Kochi in India, following them to Goa, Mumbai, Kolkata, and finally ending the chase in Cherrapunji (once the wettest place on earth). What followed was an engaging travelogue and analysis on how the absence of monsoon can make or break the country.

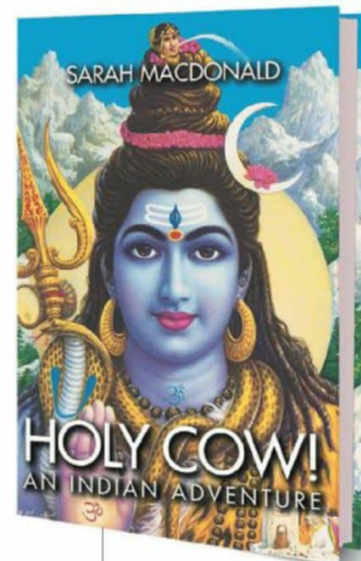
PRICE ₹318/US\$4.5
WHERE TO BUY
amazon.in



A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA
Paul Brunton

In his search for ultimate peace, Paul Brunton wandered the streets of India, and lived among sages, gurus, and mystics with otherworldly skills, only to be convinced that true tranquillity can only be found within. Doubling both as a travelogue and a spiritual piece, this one's a delightful read for readers of all kinds.

PRICE ₹539/US\$8
WHERE TO BUY
amazon.in



HOLY COW! AN INDIAN ADVENTURE
Sarah MacDonald

From absolutely hating India during her first backpacking trip, to reluctantly moving here because of her partner's work commitments, to experiencing a close brush with death, to understanding religion and spirituality, the book is loaded with drama and humour. Join Sarah MacDonald on her journey to find peace amidst chaos.

PRICE ₹310/US\$4.5
WHERE TO BUY
flipkart.com

Of Countless EXPERIENCES

German Instagrammers **Vivian** and **Johannes** have travelled to over 40 countries, but their memories of India remain the fondest. From climbing mountains to chasing waterfalls—the couple is always on the lookout for new adventures to surprise their 200k (and counting!) followers. Here, they share their travel tales from different parts of India and why they would return time and again to this mystical land. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



TRAVEL COUPLE
JO & VIVI
@jovi_travel

Q. What were your first impressions about India?

At first, India can be quite overwhelming. Here, everything is simply bigger—the cities, the traffic and chaos, the crowd. But as soon as we took a breath, we also noticed the *big* beauty in everything. It's a country of mystery and spirituality, scents and spices, and fascinating architecture and monuments. It's one of the most colourful places we've ever been to! The people are among the warmest and most welcoming bunch we've ever had the pleasure to meet. Let's say by Day 2 [of our trip], we totally fell in love with the country.

Q. Did you follow any dos and don'ts while travelling around the country?

We always try to follow the written and the unwritten rules in the countries we visit. In India, we made sure we dressed conservatively and avoided holding hands in public. We also ate with our hands, drank so many sweet lassis, smiled at everyone we



"India is not the easiest place to get along with in the beginning, but definitely one of the most diverse, beautiful, and interesting countries we've visited so far!"

met, and had at least one chai a day. We always try to behave like the locals—in terms of places we eat at, local transport, etc. We can tell from our experience—this is the best way to get to know a country and its people.

Q. Which are the places you ticked off your India bucket list?

Number one is the Taj Mahal in Agra. We desperately wanted to visit it for years and seeing it in real life exceeded all our expectations. The city of Jaipur was simply a dream with an abundance of spectacular buildings. We just couldn't get enough of all the colourful details, especially at the Amer Fort and City Palace.

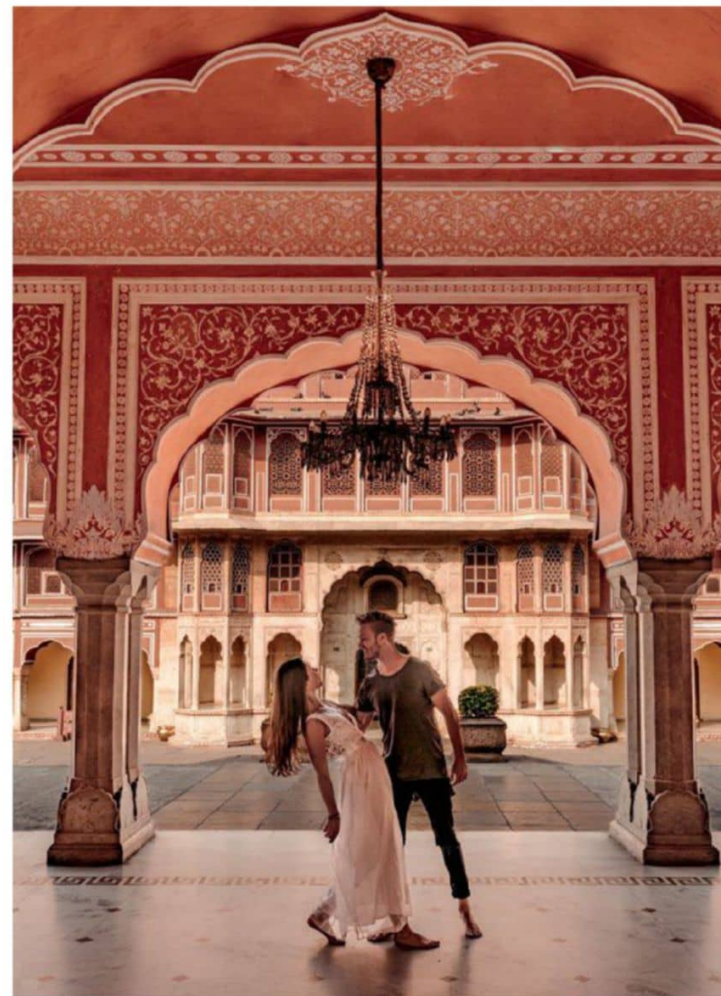
Q. Did you face any challenge on your trip?

Once, we had to spend a five-hour-long train journey sitting on the floor as the train was running full, and the only way to get on that train was to buy an unreserved ticket! But even then, we had a great time talking to fellow travellers.

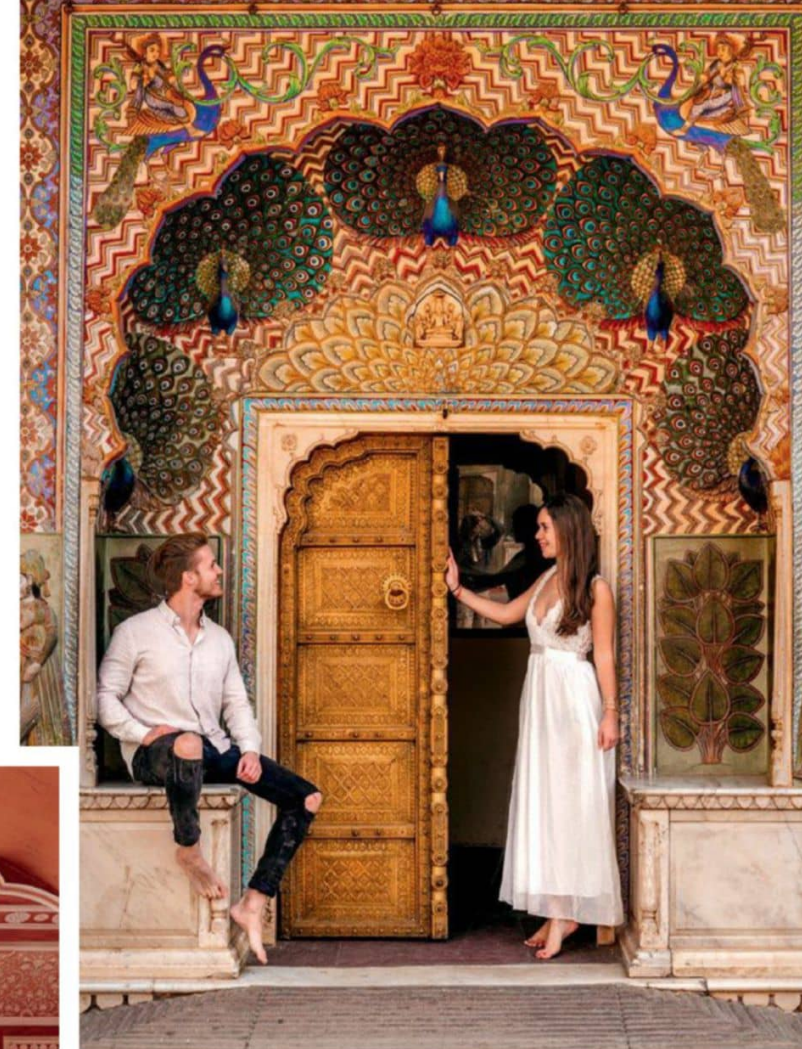
VIVIAN AND JOHANNES (5)



"Good things take time and are definitely worth waiting for! This one is from Amer Fort in Jaipur, Rajasthan."



"We had no idea how much travelling would change us. Travelling the world together is definitely the best thing that could have happened to us as a couple."



The beautiful Lotus Gate at the City Palace in Jaipur. It is adorned with dramatic motifs of lotus petals and other flowers. It represents the summer and Hindu Lord Shiva.

Q. Your message to people planning a trip to India?

Just do it! Many people are hesitant when it comes to visiting India. While some say it's not safe to travel, others are afraid if they'll be able to handle the spicy food or the crowd. Despite all the odss, we had the best time in India. The only dangerous thing that could happen to you is getting stuck in traffic. Other than that, we felt 100 per cent comfortable and safe during our entire trip. Yes, the food can be a little spicy, but it's incredibly delicious. Similarly, the people can

be quite a lot to handle at times, but they're super friendly and welcoming.

Q. Do you plan to return? If yes, what's next on your bucket list?

Oh yes, we definitely plan to visit again. We'd love to see more of Rajasthan, probably sometime around the Holi festival. Visiting Varanasi is also on our list. Also, we'd like to go on a Royal Enfield tour through the Himalayas in the north. We had rented one in Kerala last time and totally loved it! India is such an enormous country, one lifetime is not enough to see it all!



Left: Luxury Swiss tents at the Sambhar Heritage Resort; Below: the reception at the Circuit House dons a bold palette.

A White Desert Tale

India's largest inland source of salt, Sambhar, an hour's drive from Jaipur, Rajasthan, attracts offbeat travellers who want to explore beyond the seasoned itinerary. The **Sambhar Heritage Resort** offers a plush stay during an adventurous escapade here.

By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**

I TOOK OFF my boots and stepped out of the car to feel (what seemed like) the sweltering salt desert that stretched before me under a bright afternoon sun. Instead, what caressed my bare feet was soft sand, cool enough for a surprising tickle. I was in the middle of Sambhar Lake, the largest inland salt lake in India, a little ahead of Jaipur in Rajasthan. With the onset of summers, the lake had dried up to a pink dustbowl. Come winter, the place transforms into a cluster of wetlands flocked by thousands of migratory flamingoes from Siberia.

As we entered the barren countryside of Sambhar, I wondered if it was wise to expect a fancy stay at a rural setting like this one. But I was wronged by the Sambhar Heritage Resort. The first and only luxe stay in the region, the 18th-



century property was built by the British, and earlier served as India's first Circuit House. High ceilings, grand arches, and eclectic decor formed initial impressions as I entered through the imposing, pink edifice of the heritage property surrounded by lush lawns. Sustainable living and eco-friendly measure are at the heart of hospitality here—think all-vegetarian restaurants, therapeutic salt treatments at the spa, and plantable stationery.



Clockwise, from above: Riding an ATV in the salt desert is a top attraction in Sambhar; thousands of flamingoes arrive in winters from Siberia; salt dunes formed as part of the salt production process.

Besides the well-appointed suites, the resort also offers a bungalow called Kothi (featuring eight suites), and 18 Swiss tents overlooking the Sambhar Lake.

A 10-minute drive from Circuit House, and a short buggy ride later, I finally entered my modern gazebo. Monochromatic design, grand chandeliers, and bathrobes with my initials set the tone for an indulgent stay. A lazy stay-in holiday was the last thing on my mind though. From exploring the lakebed on a cycle, followed by an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) ride, to getting a first-hand experience of salt production, and enjoying an exclusive wine and cheese session in the middle of the salt desert, the hotel's bespoke activities keep you engaged. Then there are other sites to check out including Ulta

Sambhar, which locals believe is haunted by a beggar's ghost who once cursed the site, and turned it upside down; Devyani Sarovar, the 'Mini Pushkar' where Mughal Emperor Akbar wedded Rani Jodha; and the temple of Goddess Shakambhari Devi, who according to popular folklore, had blessed Sambhar by transforming it into a silver land, but later, turned it into a salt lake to prevent it from the strife that would have followed the richly possession.

At night, I sat down on a cot bed for an authentic Rajasthani dinner in the middle of Sambhar Lake as local artists sang 'Kesariya baalam aawo ni, padhaaro maare des...', a popular folk song emblematic to Rajasthan's identity, while the desert gleamed under soft moonlight, making the experience absolutely surreal. **D**

IDEAL FOR
Couples, families, birdwatchers, and history enthusiasts.

WHERE
Sambhar Heritage Resort, Shakhambri Temple Rd, Jhapok, Sambhar, Rajasthan.

GETTING THERE
Jaipur airport is the closest air terminal (76 km), and offers direct connectivity from major international cities. You can also drive from Delhi to Sambhar via Delhi-Jaipur Expressway in six hours.

TARIFF
Starts from ₹12,500/US\$180, sambharheritage.com

WHEN
October to March

MUST SEE
The haunted site of Ulta Sambhar might not spook you out, but the folklore attached to it certainly will. Nevertheless, visit the place for its archeological importance. Tour the lake in a vintage buggy to see salt production.

COURTESY OF SAMBHAR HERITAGE RESORT

An Epicurean AFFAIR

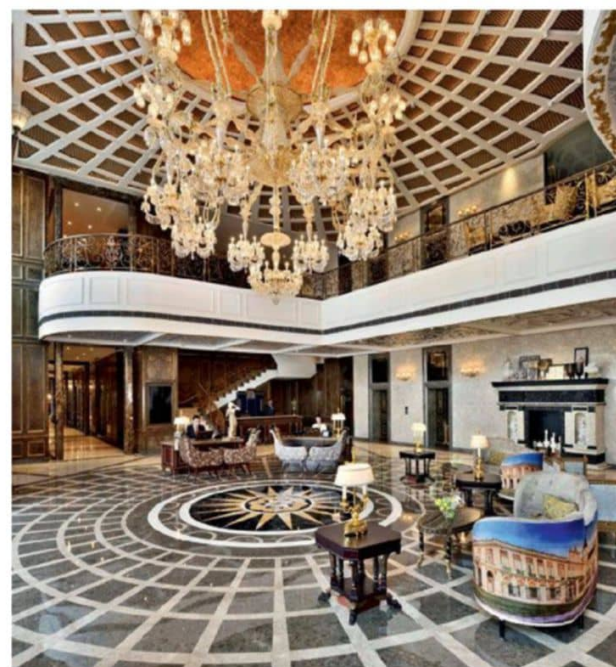
The **Radisson Blu MBD Hotel, Noida** nails old-world luxury like no other urban property with its exquisite Privé Collection rooms and suites. Find out why it deserves a stopover in your New Delhi itinerary. By **SHIKHA PUSHPAN**



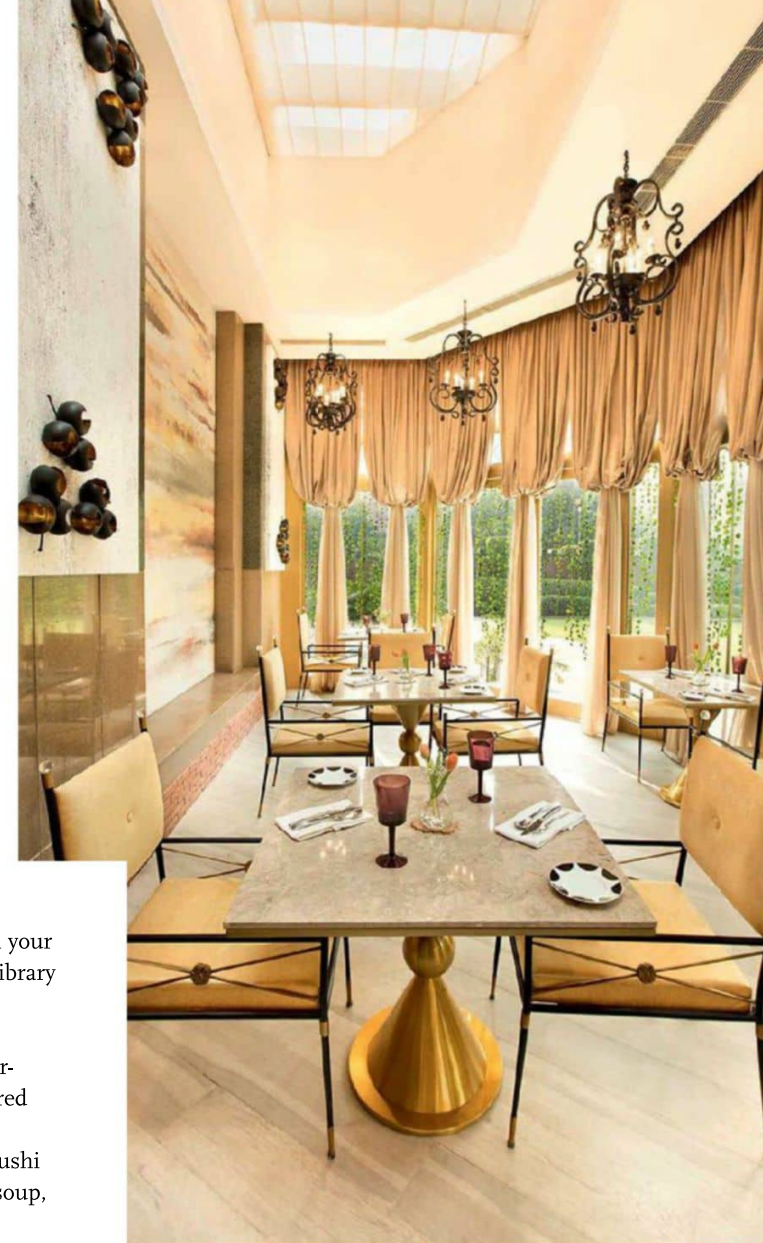
Victorian and Parisian themes are followed along the corridors. Below: The recently-refurbished lobby at the hotel.

FOR YEARS, Radisson Blu MBD Hotel, Noida was just another business hotel for me, until I had an opportunity to stay in one of its gorgeous suites in the new Privé Collection. Designed along the lines of Venetian and French decorative theme, the suites exude a regal aura with Victorian chandeliers, dreamy drapes, and generous touches of velvet. The neoclassical design follows through the corridor right up to the vanity corner in the rooms, transporting you into lavishly appointed living spaces of a colonial bungalow.

While the carefully coordinated colour schemes, bed canopies with footstools, rococo-inspired ceilings, and antique furniture do make you feel special, it's the private butler service that sweeps you off your feet. Prince Bhati, my butler, knew just when I needed to be pampered with crème brûlée and the perfect pairings for my favourite Pinot Noir. The intuitive service at the property is one of the best in the class. For instance, when I wanted to call it a day, a turned-down bed and chocolates by its side awaited me in my room, along with a hand cream and lip moisturiser. For those who like to enjoy their nightcap, the Privé Lounge is exclusively open to guests staying at the rooms of the



From above: Antique artefacts and upholstered furniture are key features of Privé Collection rooms and suites; the decor at SVIII restaurant is inspired by Victorian design theme.



Privé Collection, and offers a selection of canapés to go with your favourite cocktail. Or, borrow a book from the well-stocked library if it's the musty scent of old pages that puts you to sleep.

The hotel extends its Victorian theme to the recently refurbished all-day brasserie SXVIII (pronounced St8). Floor-to-ceiling windows offer uninterrupted views of the manicured gardens outside, while antique artefacts, and ornate ceilings overlook sumptuous buffet tables serving everything from sushi to tortellini. I liked the fennel- and saffron-infused seafood soup, tuna niçoise, and oven-roasted sea bass. Made in India, the Indian restaurant on the first floor, features a striking astronomy-inspired ceiling and offers the Maharaja and Maharani quarters for a private dining experience. The place pays special attention to presentation—for instance, *sultani seekh* (a type of kebab) was served on a sword! We reserved the pan-Asian restaurant, R.E.D. (Rare Eastern Dining), for the evening. As I had a hard time choosing between *chá li wasabi cha tou* and prawn *sui mui* for starters, the Singaporean head chef Raymond Sim took charge and rolled out some signature dishes, such as salmon and cheese pillow, scallops served with red radish and home-made salsa; and tuna tartare with chilli teriyaki and capelin fish roe. I rounded off the experience with a spring-roll ice cream (deep-fried spring rolls filled with lychee ice cream and served with fresh fruits), and went home content.

At the Privé Collection rooms and suites, colonial paintings share space with antique brass wall scones, upholstered arm chair makes one feel comfortable to a fault, and ornate chandeliers watch over guests from baroque ceilings, lending the space an unmatched global appeal perfect for the discerning international traveller. **D**

COURTESY OF RADISSON BLU MBD NOIDA

IDEAL FOR
Families and couples.

WHERE
Radisson Blu MBD Noida, L2 Beside Centrestage Mall, Sector 18, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

TARIFF
Privé Collection rooms start from ₹18,000/ US\$257, radissonblu.com

GETTING THERE
The nearest airport is the Indira Gandhi International Terminal (30 km) in New Delhi. Ask the hotel's

concierge to arrange a pick-up from the airport or hire a prepaid taxi.

MUST-SEE
Birdwatchers can explore the nearby Okhla Bird Sanctuary (obs-up.com) during early hours on a bicycle to spot different species of birds, including white throated kingfisher and eurasian spoonbill. For a day-long trip, ask the concierge to plan a trip to the Taj Mahal in Agra (180 km) via the New Yamuna Expressway.

Monsoon MANSION

Sitting pretty on the banks of Lake Pichola, **Trident, Udaipur** is the perfect hideout you should check into this season for a memorable experience.

By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



Clockwise, from left: The in-house bar, Amrit Mahal; a postcard perfect dining venue at the hotel; the rooms and suites at the Trident, Udaipur double as viewing galleries for the beautiful vistas outside.

ONLY A FEW cities can get as romantic as Udaipur—especially during the monsoons. Situated in the northwestern state of Rajasthan, ‘The City of Lakes’ beautifully combines the romance of palatial mansions and ornate waterfront properties. On the banks of the shimmering Lake Pichola, sits one such hotel that captures the city’s innate heritage through its intrinsic design and well-appointed living spaces. The Trident, Udaipur is among the few hotels in the city that offer unobstructed views of the iconic Jag Mandir palace and the surrounding Aravalli mountain range. A 10-minute drive from the city centre brings one to the palatial lobby of the five-star hotel, where 83 rooms and four suites embody the grandeur of the historic city and afford some of the best views. The hotel’s dining destinations translate the city’s regal heritage in its signature offerings.

While the all-day multi-cuisine restaurant, Aravalli offers gourmet spreads of Rajasthani, Asian, Western, and Indian cuisines; The Terrace serves global delicacies in an immaculate al fresco setting. Reserve the evenings for the hotel’s bar, Amrit Mahal, where live performances set the stage for an engaging experience. Or, spend time around the outdoor swimming pool and order your favourite sundowners as the glittering skies and surrounding vistas cast a spell on you.

For those who like to sweat it out before calling it a day, a well-equipped fitness centre awaits guests for a productive workout session. Those travelling with kids can sit back and enjoy their leisure time as the exclusive Kids Club takes care of every need of the little guests. From offering facilities, such as a splash pool and a cricket field to hosting more engaging activities like movie sessions, treasure hunts, and baking and pottery lessons, the hotel makes sure the kids have an unforgettable experience. The hotel also features exquisite banqueting spaces for special gatherings and functions.

At Trident, Udaipur, charming interiors coupled with modern creature comforts and exceptional culinary offerings make every stay exceptional and truly extraordinary. tridenthotels.com

COURTESY OF TRIDENT HOTELS

Fusion is the Word

Bold flavours, quirky plating, and tasteful interiors make **Farzi Café** in Gurugram (Delhi-NCR) worth your time to experience the city’s dining culture . By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHAT WE LOVED

Of the many connotations attached to its name, the modern Indian bistro chooses to go with the one that translates to ‘creating illusions’, and rightly so. The marriage between traditional Indian flavours and modern culinary techniques is impressive. Besides, the brand has managed to retain the quality and innate flavours of its fusion food despite the opening of numerous outlets across the country. In terms of ambience, think textured furniture in dark wood, quirky artworks, chandeliers, and a stage for live performances.

SIGNATURE DISHES

DI RECOMMENDS

Order edamame hummus with *kori* roti crisps for starters. With fresh guacamole and salsa on side, and sour cream and nachos on top, the Mexican Rice Bowl is an appetising and filling pick for mains. Do try the pumpkin and coconut *khao suey*, and the Hyderabad *haleem* risotto—served piping hot with mutton pickle and Gujarati *khakra* after being slow-cooked for 24 hours! Go Indie, and order *balushahi* 2.0—the glazed dessert comes with vanilla ice cream filled in, and roasted nuts peppered on.

FINAL TAKE

WHY WE WOULD RETURN

Favourite staples served with a modern spin at a chic setting, alongside live music make it a popular choice among diners looking for good food and wine hangout. Also, we’d love to stop by again to try one of their popular concoctions, chai *pani* and *aam papad bunta*.

THE DETAILS

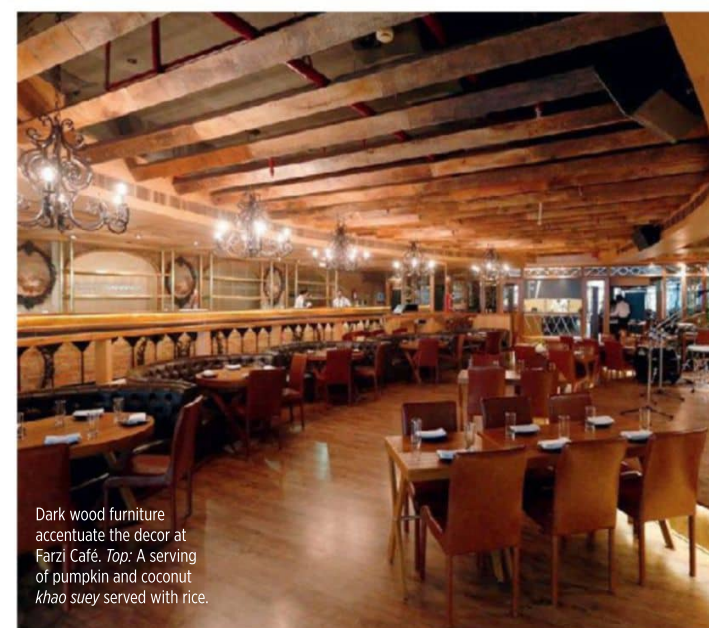
COST FOR TWO
₹2,200/US\$31
without alcohol
(plus taxes)

RECOMMENDED FOR
Couples and friends

ADDRESS

7-8, Ground Floor,
Cyber Hub, DLF
Cyber City,
Gurugram

RESERVATION
farzicafe.com

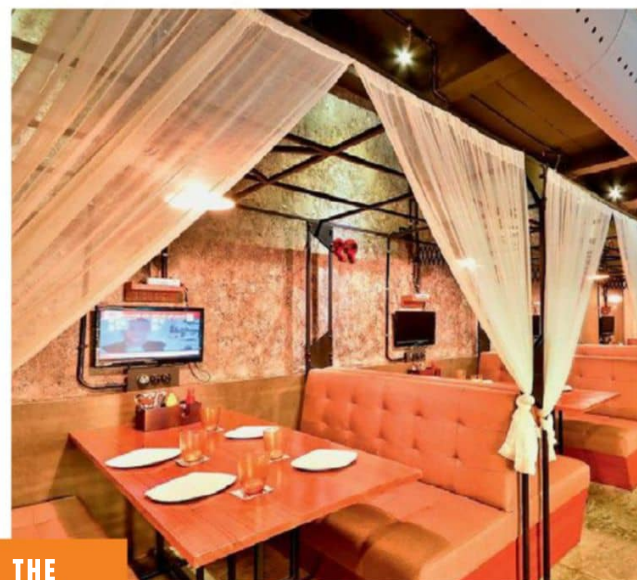


Dark wood furniture accentuate the decor at Farzi Café. Top: A serving of pumpkin and coconut *khao suey* served with rice.

COURTESY OF FARZI CAFE



Clockwise: The bar at Cafe Delhi Heights; a glass of red wine sangria; private seatings for a romantic dinner.



Room for All Moods

Cafe Delhi Heights in New Delhi's Aerocity is where visitors come to enjoy their drinks over flowing conversations. Located close to the airport, it is emerging as a go-to place for a quick drink during short layovers. By **NIDHI KANDARI**

○ FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHAT WE LOVED

Unlike many of its contemporaries, Delhi Heights is spread over two floors, which gives ample elbow room on busy evenings. The quirky interiors feature pop colours, picnic-style tables, cosy corner couches, and private spaces with dreamy drapes to ensure a seating for every mood.

○ SIGNATURE DISHES

DI RECOMMENDS

A poster reading 'Juicy Lucy Burger, sold 3,00,000 till

now' welcomes diners. Look no further and order this bestseller—a thick juicy lamb patty with a variety of veggies and a whole lot of cheese inside a sesame seed burger bun—to set the tone for the experience. Vegetarians can try Al Bella Pizza with a thin crispy crust, dollops of bocconcini cheese, and fresh basil leaves, sundried tomatoes, black olives and green onions. We loved how the strong flavour of basil lingered in the mouth for a while. Round off the experience with bannoffie pie that comes full of fluffy

THE DETAILS

COST FOR TWO
₹2,000/US\$29
without alcohol (plus taxes)

RECOMMENDED FOR
Friends and families

ADDRESS
GF-11, Worldmark-3,
Aerocity, IGI Airport,
New Delhi

RESERVATION
cafedelhiheights.com

cream, cookie crumbles, and toffee syrup.

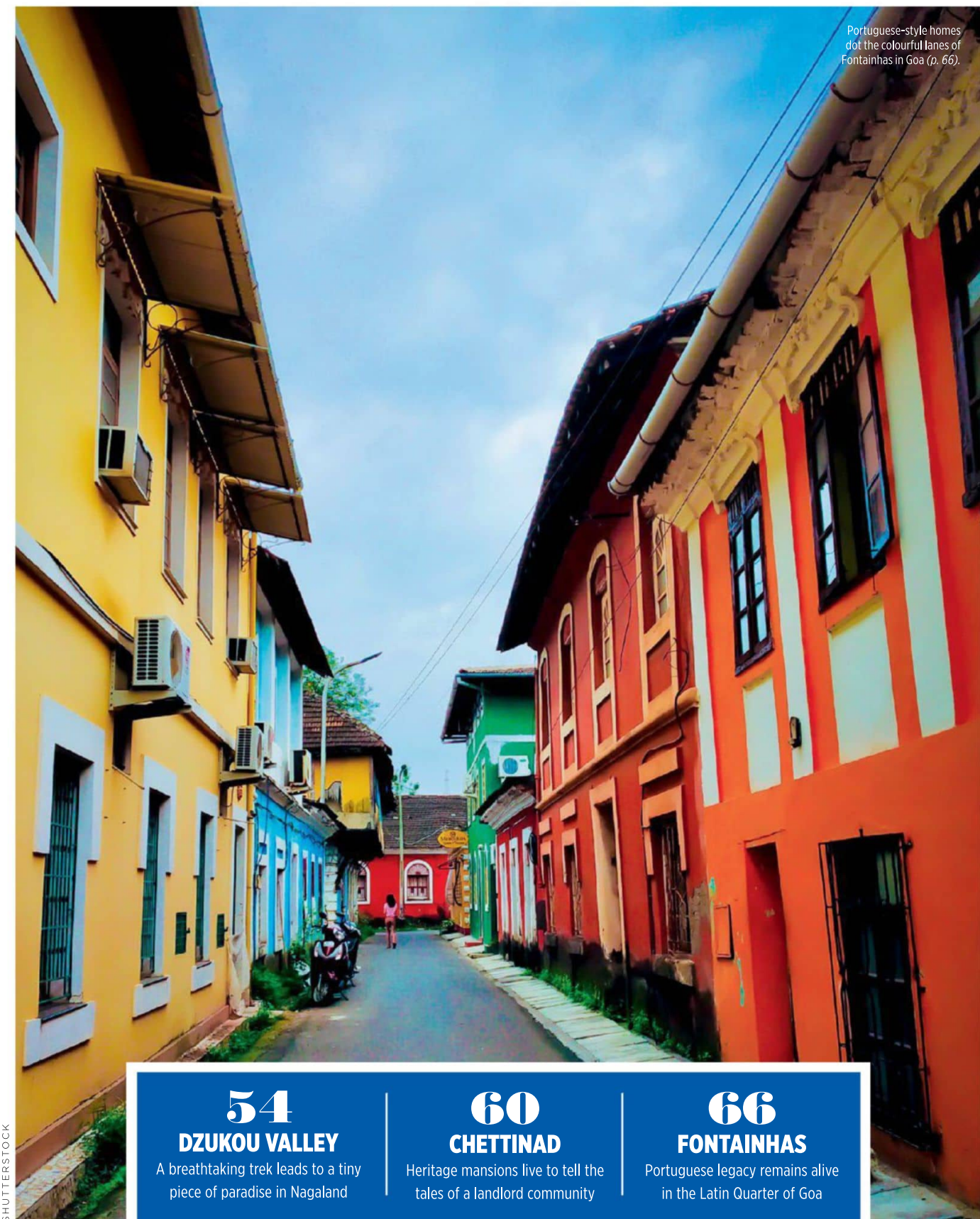
○ FINAL TAKE

WHY WE WOULD RETURN

Besides the extensive menu, which features multiple cuisines—Indian, Italian, Asian, American—a special vegan menu is also available on demand. The Rosé Sangria—light, tangy, and very refreshing—served here is one of the best in the city and definitely worth a second visit. **D**

COURTESY OF CAFE DELHI HEIGHTS

Di explore



Portuguese-style homes dot the colourful lanes of Fontainhas in Goa (p. 66).

SHUTTERSTOCK

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DZUKOU VALLEY

A breathtaking trek leads to a tiny piece of paradise in Nagaland

60

CHETTINAD

Heritage mansions live to tell the tales of a landlord community

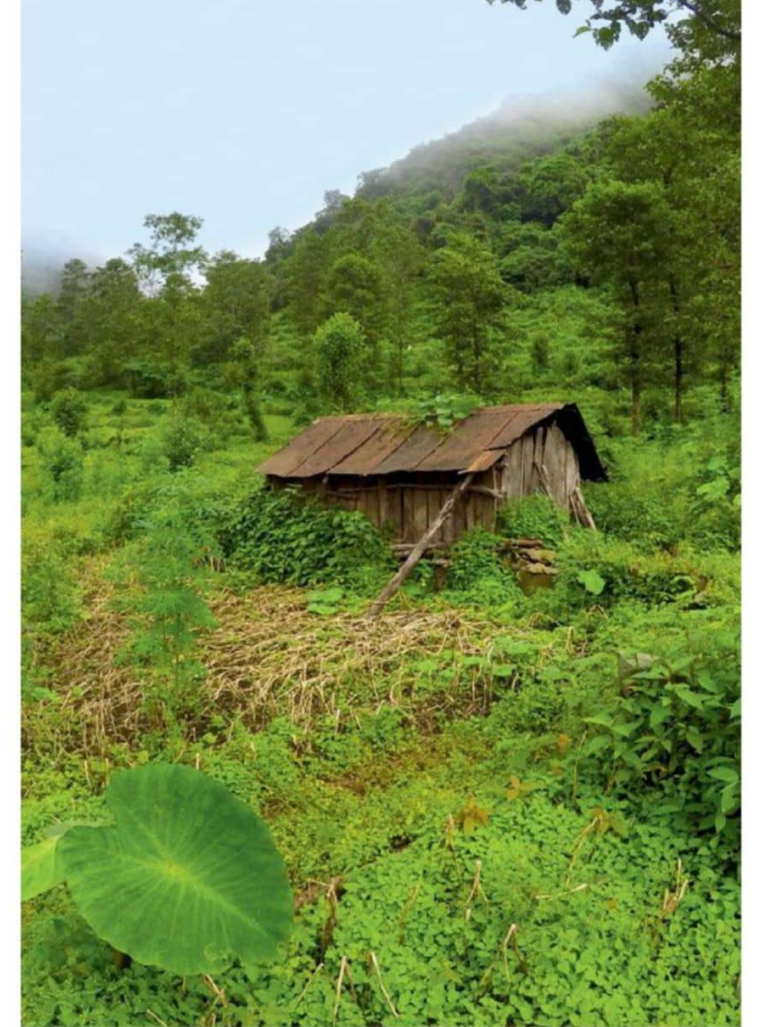
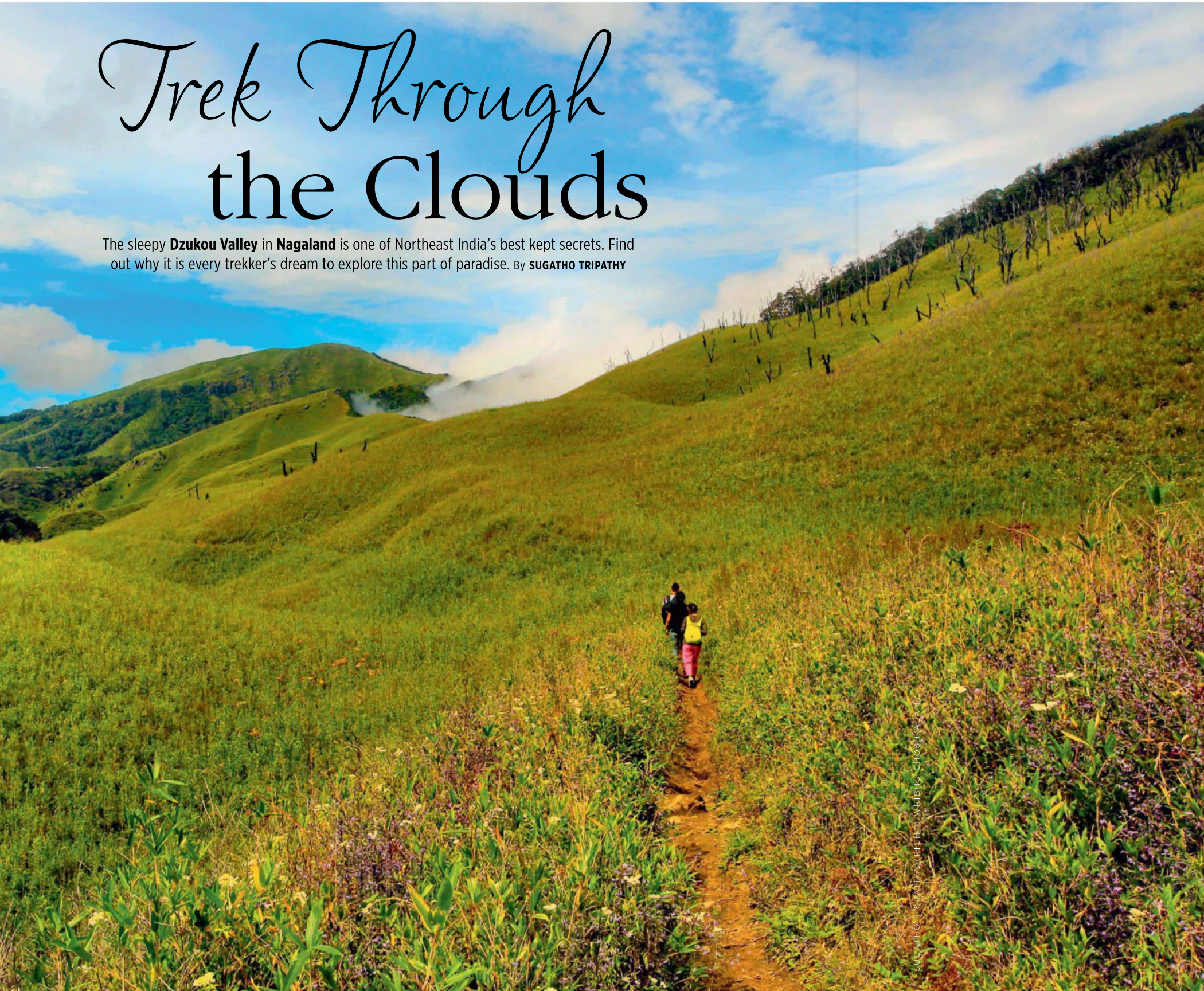
66

FONTAINHAS

Portuguese legacy remains alive in the Latin Quarter of Goa

Trek Through the Clouds

The sleepy **Dzukou Valley** in **Nagaland** is one of Northeast India's best kept secrets. Find out why it is every trekker's dream to explore this part of paradise. By **SUGATHO TRIPATHY**



THERE IS something elemental about the mountains, which leaves most of us dreamy eyed and transcends us to a silent state of being. The dazzling white snow-capped ones are not the only ones that reserve the right to stun us. The hills of the mystical Dzukou Valley on the border of Manipur and Nagaland in northeastern India offer a view, which is absolute storybook splendour. The incredible topography where dense green hills of various altitudinal range, shape and size, run into each other and blend seamlessly under an exhilarating green carpet.

My tour company had recommended a full day for the trek and termed it as a “light-moderate journey.” Little did I know before signing the contract that the four hours (one-way) trek would involve vertiginous climbs and precarious descends combined with slippery narrow pathways, gushing streams, and tall overgrown bushes blinding your vision intermittently.

Dzukou Valley can be approached via two routes. The shorter, steeper, and more difficult route is through Zakhama Village, and usually preferred by experienced trekkers. The longer

From left: The Dzukou Valley trek sees very few visitors as its relatively unknown; small rest houses are the only accommodation options.

route, which involves relatively easier ascends and descends is through Viswema Village. Since this is a eight to nine-hour-long trek (both ways combined), it is advisable to take a porter to carry water, food, and even tents; add sleeping bags and warm clothing to the list if you wish to spend the night there. Preferably, take the services of a local travel agency, which usually provides a porter and a guide. They also take care of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) required for all Indian and foreign tourists to visit places in Nagaland.

The four-wheeler path ends at Viswema Village (25 km from capital Kohima). You can also choose to start from Zakhma village (20 km from Kohima). We started from the base village of Viswema. The trekking path at the beginning is a narrow dirt road with protruding stones, uneven pebbles, and muddy slush pools. The second level of the trek is a steep winding climb via stone slabs cut in a whimsical manner. The 1,200 odd stairs to the top of the hill cut through a dense forest of bamboo, oak, chestnut, birch, and maple trees. When my body started cramping after half an hour, I realised that my two days' crash course in the gym to get ready for the trek wasn't enough. However, my guide and the porter seemed to be walking on a different

terrain. Skipping, jumping, and swerving like they were in a children's park playing the joy rides with ease and fun. "We once came here with our friends and covered the trek in 2.5 hours," chided Ruzono, my guide. Unfortunately, it didn't help in speeding me up. "The pathway and the surrounding are always damp and moist as the place receives rainfall for close to eight months a year," informed my porter Zang, seeing me slip several times, involuntarily accompanied with a sheepish smile.

Once we trekked up the mountain (which took about two hours), the view was rewarding. Clouds floated beneath us and it marked the entrance of Dzukou Valley. As we embarked on the trek path, the topography changed abruptly. The hills became lush green. Identical sloping mountains emerged on either side at the base of which meandered the narrow River Dzukou. The trek path has been carved out of the sloping hills and thus moves along the natural curve. All along the route, the unconventional landscape enchants you. Charred black tree trunks and branches dot the gorgeous slopes throughout the trek forming the perfect juxtaposition between the green hills and the blooming flowers. Apart from the famous white lilies endemic to this region, there

Below, from left: Experienced trekkers usually carry tents along for longer stays; you can also hire porters to carry essentials, such as water, food, and tent. *Opposite:* Monsoon is the best period to witness the flowers in full bloom.



FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; EARL & NAZIMA KOWALL/GETTYIMAGES; OPPOSITE: SUGATHO TRIPATHY



are a plethora of other exotic wild flowers that bloom seasonally. Since the entire valley is filled with a type of tough bamboo bush, it makes the place look like a large freshly mowed lawn.

Legendary stories about the locale from ancient folklores of Nagaland make the trek even more interesting. An uncanny feature is the presence of numerous charred black tree trunks and branches. These black woods seem like installations of modern art sculptures in a quirky terrain. I wondered about the reason for their existence. Was it because of forest fire? Or, some killer fungi? “Dzukou is haunted by spirits,” said Ruzono in a hushed tone. “They don’t let the trees bear leaves. The reason why the grass and flowers around the trees bloom, but the trees don’t. It is a cursed land.” Zang seemed to disagree. “There is no such thing. The locals methodically burn the trees every year to keep the spirits happy and at bay,” he said. I was already regretting my question when I heard the word ‘spirit’ twice! There are many theories floating around the charred woods. The more believable one indicates an unprecedented forest fire. I also learnt that Dzukou in the local dialect means ‘dull and soulless,’—an irony considering its spectacular scenery.

Right: The landscape of Dzukou Valley looks straight out of a fairy tale. *Below, from left:* A wildflower from the family of *Jacobaea Vulgaris*; *Lilium Chitragadae* is a rare species of lily, found only in the Dzukou Valley.



The four-hour-long trek can be arduous and challenging for the inexperienced or first timers. However, the mesmerising view at the end justified every effort put into reaching here. Reminiscent of the sand dunes in the Thar (Rajasthan) or the cold desert of Nubra Valley (Kashmir), numerous smooth shaped hills rolled into each other in an intertwined pattern. Rows of white lily and purple shrubs were interspersed with myriad shapes of black tree trunks on green wavy grassland. The grandeur of the sight was stunning and the sense of peace absolute. All the trekkers who reached along with me shared an unspoken joy of watching nature’s elemental beauty offered as the perfect reward at the end. Trek further down to the valley to reach the river and you find yourself in the midst of a wonderland. It is impossible to describe Dzukou Valley in phrases that aren’t clichés—breathtaking, enchanting, and unforgettable. **D**

GETTING THERE

Dimapur is the nearest air terminal. Daily flights operate between the nearest metro, Kolkata, and Dimapur. Cabs charge ₹2,000/US\$29 onwards for one way. The ideal base to start the trek is Viswema village or Zakhma village, both at an hours’ drive from capital, Kohima.

STAY

Dzukou offers small rest houses with basic facilities (read bed and a washroom) for as low as ₹300/US\$5. It is advisable to trek Dzukou in the day and stay in Kohima. **De Oriental Grand** offers comfortable accommodation (starts from ₹4,500/US\$65, deorientalgrand.com). **Hotel Vivor** is another fine hotel replete with all the

amenities and popular for its impeccable hospitality (starts from ₹3,300/US\$48, niathugroup.com).

WHEN

June to September is the period when the flowers are in full bloom. However, trekking in the monsoons can be a bit difficult.

IDEAL FOR

Trekkers and nature-lovers.

MUST-SEE

Once you’ve reached at the end of the trek path (where the rest houses are built), go further below and explore the River Dzukou. The place also has a helipad, where tourists have their packed lunch while enjoying views of the hills.

Discovering Chettinad, One Mansion at a Time

In the arid interiors of **Tamil Nadu** lies **Chettinad**, a testament to the wealth and worldliness of the Chettiars. Discover their heritage and culture through fort-like mansions, beautiful temples, and delectable food.

By **MARY ANN ISSAC**

The Athangudi tiles are a key feature of Chettiars' mansions.

MARY ANN ISSAC

MARY ANN ISSAC; (TOP) DBIMAGES/ALAMY

A LONG THE SLEEPY streets of Karaikudi, the economic centre of the Chettinad region in southern India, are remnants of a glorious past. Beautiful mansions with intricate stonework line the alleyways. A pickup van on the roadside awaits treasures from within one of these mansions as I stroll by. An ornate almirah with a mirrored door, and a crystal chandelier are leaving what has been their home for the better part of a century. I am intrigued—I want to find out more about this illustrious community tucked away in the depths of arid Tamil Nadu.

WHO ARE THE CHETTIARS?

In the early centuries of the second millennium, the Chettiars were ship chandlers, salt merchants, rice traders, and gem dealers. They were also bankers who lent to farmers, landowners, and local kings. The close relationships they had with the community earned them large tracts of land and the title of zamindar, meaning a landowner who leased his land to tenant farmers (think aristocrats!). Their business prowess and financial acumen earned them the favour of the ruling kings, and later the British East India Company. They sailed the seas, with both Indian and British fleets to countries in Southeast Asia, like Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma. Abroad, they were an integral part of local finance and trade, which soon made them wealthy business people.

The Chettiars founded 96 villages in rural Tamil Nadu and built opulent fort-like mansions, that encouraged their being referred to as *Nagarathar* (meaning 'land fort', owing to their capacious homes) and *Nattukottai* (meaning 'sophisticated' or 'townsfolk') *Chettiar*.

After World War II, when most of South and Southeast Asia gained independence, the Chettiars had to leave behind their businesses in foreign lands and return home with just a fraction of their wealth. Many sold their imported wares to maintain their mansions, while others had to give up their beloved homes in entirety. Today, the region known as Chettinad has only 73 villages, and most Chettiars have left for different parts of the world to sink new roots.

STORIES IN STONES

Chettiar homes put forth a beautiful amalgamation of vibrant Tamil traditions coupled with European architecture (courtesy:



From above: Intricate details mark the vibrant interiors of the mansions; most of the heritage homes in Karaikudi are managed by local caretakers.

LOCAL TALE

'Muthu' and 'Vairavan' are common names amongst Chettiars. Their origin can be traced to the time the community was into trading jewels. *Muthu* means pearl, and *Vairavan* stems from the word *vairam*, diamond.



TRIVIA

The sheen on the walls of Chettinad homes are due to a special plaster that's prepared using egg whites and seashell lime.

From above: The Italian marbles and grandiose chandeliers speak volumes about the Chettians' wealth; the mansions feature a beautiful mix of Tamil traditions and European architecture.

their erstwhile colonial rulers). The houses, built cheek by jowl in a grid pattern, most often stretch across two streets. When looking in from the front entrance, you see a straight line of doorways across a series of courtyards, each a diminishing rectangle of light, hiding mysteries within.

Step inside a palatial bungalow and you are instantly taken back in time to a bustling home in its heyday. On the verandah near the front door, you see accountants seated cross-legged on the marble floor, leaning against a wall adorned with colourful Japanese tiles in floral patterns, and working diligently.

The elaborate carvings of deities on the heavy Burma teak doors invite you into the art deco reception area, where black-and-white Italian marble floors and intricate ceiling frescos vie for attention, while the enormous Italian and Belgian chandeliers complement the grandiose setting.

Following the intricate wall frescoes and recreating the birth and life of Lord Krishna, you enter a courtyard to witness the wedding of a Chettiar bride. You can almost hear the tinkling of anklets and bangles as little girls dressed in bright red and orange, and adorned with fragrant flowers, run through the double-colonnaded corridor. The feast that follows is in the extensive dining hall, with high ceilings and Belgian stained-glass windows.

The cries of babies and sounds of excited chatter take you to the women's quarters. Iron rings attached to the wood-panelled ceilings hold bright hammocks in which little ones are rocked to sleep to the sound of sweet lullabies. Next, the clanking of brass utensils and aromas of ground spices lead you to the kitchen abuzz with staff preparing the next meal to feed the family and their guests.

Every one of the 10,000 to 15,000 Chettiar homes left in the region tell a similar story, and each one is equally fascinating. The Chettians built their residences keeping in mind the arid climate in this part of the state. The houses were built around an east-west central courtyard that kept them cool and provided shade, light, and air. They also built thick brick walls with lime plaster, multiple layers of terracotta tile roofs, marble-and-stone floors, which helped to keep the house cool. The sloping roofs helped collect water for household use, while the excess flowed through the drainage system to replenish local waterbodies.

Mansion hopping is one of the best ways to explore Chettinad, and most mansions in the villages of Athangudi, Kanadukathan and Karaikudi are left open during the day for visitors. In most of these residences, the owners live elsewhere, leaving the management of their homes to caretakers, who expect a tip of ₹100/US\$1.5 for the tour. Some of the notable houses in Chettinad include, MSMM House and Aayiram Janal Veedu (House with a Thousand Windows) in Karaikudi; VVR house, Chettinadu Mansion, Chettinadu Palace, and

Lakshmi Vilas in Kanadukathan; and Periya Veedu in Athangudi

TRADITIONAL FARE

"One is fortunate to eat like a Chettiar"—this popular saying in Chettinad, as I soon discover, is absolutely spot-on. Traditionally, meals are served on a banana leaf, its bright green contrasting with the vibrant vegetarian dishes served on it in an all-you-can-eat manner. Contrary to popular belief, Chettinad cuisine is not spicy; instead, a beautiful blend of spices create a depth of flavour in their distinctive dishes. Star anise, cinnamon, black pepper, and red chilli are key to most traditional fare. The Chettians' travels have influenced their cuisine, the most notable feature being the introduction of meat and fish into their diets. From their travels to Southeast Asia, they brought back *kavuni* rice, a black rice that is the star ingredient in a sweet concoction of coconut milk and

Below: The clan temples in Chettinad are worth a visit for their intricate architecture.



MARY ANN ISSAC (TOP) HEMIS/ALAMY

DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY



sugar. Try it at The Bangala (thebangala.com) and Chidambara Vilas (chidambaravilas.com). At the Chettinadu Mansion (chettinadmansion.com) in Kanadukathan, the traditional banana-leaf lunch starts with a light lentil soup, followed by servings of vegetable biryani, fried fish, and chicken curry. The Bangala, renowned for its food, both the traditional and the Anglo-Indian or ‘butler’ cuisine, has brought gourmands from the world over to its doors. The ‘butler’ cuisine is a clever mix of Indian spices with traditional English recipes—mutton chops with a spiced egg coating; stews that have been Indianised take the form of fish and egg molee. Of their traditional offerings, the mutton, crab and cashew curries served at dinner are sensational. For breakfast, keep an eye out for *paniyarappam*, a fried dumpling made of soaked rice and lentil mixture, spiced with onions, green chillies, curry leaves, and coriander leaves.

DID YOU KNOW?

Earlier, chicken meat that had been sun-dried after being marinated in natural preservatives were kept for 65 days at sea. Thus was born the famous *Chicken 65*.

From above: A traditional meal served at a Chettinad residence; Chettinad is being considered for the status of UNESCO World Heritage Site.

ROOM FOR MORE

The handcrafted tiles of Athangudi feature vibrant designs and intricate detailing. The artisans at the tile factory give live demonstrations to visitors in exchange of ₹100/US\$1.5 tip. Visitors can also design their own tiles. Selva Industries (athanguditiles.com) is one such place. The artisans explain the process of creating tiles, which takes almost 10 days from



A visit to Chettinad is incomplete without exploring shops selling antiques.



MARY ANN ISSAC (TOP) IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY

start to finish. A wet mix of cement, sand and colour is poured into a design stencil, which is kept on a glass slab held in a metal frame. The design is then covered with a dry mix of cement and sand, and a separate wet mix of cement, and left to dry. Once fully dried, the glass is removed to reveal a smooth, glossy tile. They are ideal for floors, but not for walls given that they can weigh up to 1.5 kilograms each.

Religion is central to Chettinad culture. The establishment of the 96 villages was followed by the foundation of nine clan temples. The modern-day Chettiars, regardless of their place of birth, bear allegiance to one of these clans. They have close ties to their clan, and marry from within. Though spread around the world, most Chettiars come home to celebrate temple festivals and family events.

The temples here are a true testament to the Chettiars’ wealthy heritage, with elaborate carvings on wood and stone, of preferred deities and events from sacred texts. One can spend hours at a temple, wandering the grounds, studying the carvings to identify the stories they tell. The nine clan temples include, Ilaythangudi, Mathur, Vairavanpatti, Iraniyur, Pillayarpatti, Nemam, Iluppakudi, Soorakudi, and Velangudi. **D**

GETTING THERE

Chennai (300 km) is the nearest metro to Chettinad. Direct flights also operate between New Delhi and Madurai (75 km). Cabs are available at the airport for onward journey for ₹4,000/US\$57

STAY

Wake up to the sounds of old Tamil songs at **The Bangala, Karaikudi**, where decades-old furniture and walls adorned with sepia-toned pictures of Chettiars in their heyday will be the biggest takeaways. The place is managed by a powerhouse octogenarian Meenakshi Meyyappan, who is a proud *Nagarathar*. An ambassador of Chettiar culture to the world, she has created quiet corners with cupboards of literature on Chettinad—its people, culture and food. *Starts from ₹7,212/US\$103, thebangala.com*

Chidamabara Vilas, Kanadukathan is a beautifully renovated Chettinad home with facilities, such as a swimming pool. The hotel offers insightful tours into the region’s history and masterclasses on

Chettiar cuisine. *Starts from ₹8,999 / US\$130, chidambaravilas.com*

SHOP

The **Karaikudi Antique Market** on the Muneesvaran Kovil street is every antique-lover’s dream. From colourful enamel-coated cutlery imported from England to original Tanjore paintings—this street is a revelation in terms of its offerings. Visit **Sri Mahalakshmi Handloom Weaving Centre** (19/6, K.M.Street, Kanadukathan) to watch weavers prepare vibrant Chettinad saris.

WHEN

October to March

IDEAL FOR

Anyone who loves history and has an eye for details

MUST-SEE

The Thirumayam Fort in Pudukkottai offers unbeatable views of the villages of Chettinad. The Ayyanar Horse Temple in Kanadukathan is also worth a visit for its terracotta horses.



Watch My DIFFERENT SHADES!

Go beyond the balmy beaches and heady flea markets to explore the quaint neighbourhood of **Fontainhas** in the Latin Quarter of Goa. By **MARY ANN ISSAC**

FUN FACTS

The term Fontainhas was derived from *Fonte Phoenix* or Fountain Phoenix, a reservoir built by the Portuguese in the nearby Mala area. The 31st January Road was so named to mark Portugal's independence from Spain in 1640.

find yourself among the few tourists walking the streets. Staying true to the Portuguese culture, the locals take their siesta seriously—even shops are closed in the afternoon hours! The buildings are painted every year after the monsoons to ensure the upkeep of the area, a rule that's being followed since the time of Portuguese occupation. As you walk around the Latin Quarter, you find the rooster hidden in plain sight on top of many houses. The iconic rooster in Portuguese culture signifies honesty, integrity, trust, and honour, and is believed to bring good fortune.

BIRTH OF A EUROPEAN TOWN

A charming testimony to Goa's erstwhile Portuguese occupation, Fontainhas in the relaxed state capital of Panjim, is an offbeat escape from the serene but crowded beaches of the riverine state. Originally a mangrove swamp, Fontainhas was turned into a coconut plantation by a Goan expat, Antonio Joao de Sequeira, and was later bequeathed by him to the Carmelite nuns.

In the mid 1800s when the plague ravaged the state, the Portuguese moved their capital from Old Goa to Panjim, and developed the latter into a residential area for the government administrators. Though Fontainhas grew in a haphazard manner, over the years, with tiny lanes sprouting out of nowhere, it still retains the charm of a quaint European town.

FONTAINHAS BY FOOT

Flanked by the Ourem Creek to the east, and Altinho Hill to the west, Fontainhas features cobblestoned streets, colourful buildings, and has Portuguese streets names. The homes here are painted in vibrant hues of blue, yellow, red, and green, exhibit a colonial charm with oyster shell window panes, intricately designed iron railings, and red tiled roofs. However, the most distinctive feature of these former Portuguese homes is their name plates made in Azulejos ceramic tiles. (Azulejos are Portuguese style hand-painted ceramic tiles that are decorated with intricate artwork, and baked at high temperatures.) The architecture of the homes in Fontainhas reflect the *susegad* lifestyle that Goa is so known for. Take a leisurely stroll in the afternoon, and you will

SHUTTERSTOCK (2); (RIGHT) DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY



Anticlockwise, from above: A cartoon by Goan artist Mario Miranda; Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Church was one of the first churches to be built in Goa; colourful houses dot the lanes of Fontainhas.



GETTING THERE

Fontainhas in Panjim is 28 km from the Goa International Airport. Either fly in directly or take a connecting flight from New Delhi or Mumbai.

IDEAL FOR

Families and couples who'd love to soak in Goan history and culture, together.

STAY

Panjim Inn (starts from ₹4,000/US\$58, panjiminn.com);
La Maison Fontainhas (starts from ₹3,600/US\$52, laimaisongoa.com)

WHEN

November to February

MUST-SEE

Walk through the Mala neighbourhood to see the colourful Hindu homes, and visit the Maruti temple. Visit the Mario Miranda Gallery (mariodemiranda.com) and shop for prints of her famous cartoons. Shop at Velha Goa (velhagoa.net) to find a selection of Azulejos and other designer ceramic tiles.

ART CIRCUIT

Panjim Peoples (panjiminn.com) is a Baroque mansion built in the 1800s. Earlier home to a premiere school, the place was recently transformed into a heritage hotel. Within the confines of its yellow and white facade is the Gallery Gitanjali (gallerygitanjali.com), open to public and home to contemporary Indian art and Scandinavian lithographs, serigraphs, and linocuts. Spend some time with books and boardgames at the in-house cafe and take home pretty photographs and art prints. A little further away is the colonial-style Fundacao Oriente Art Gallery (Filipe Neri Road, 175, Panjim) which has on display the work of a prominent Goan artist, Antonio Xavier Trindade, fondly referred to as the 'Rembrandt of the East'.

CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

In Fontainhas, all roads lead to the St Sebastian Chapel, or so it seems! While walking around the town, one is bound to cross the quaint chapel a couple of times. Built in 1880, it houses a unique crucifix, which originally stood in the Palace of Inquisition in Old Goa, and holds an unusual importance because Jesus here is depicted with his eyes open. It was done so to instill fear amongst the heretics brought to the Inquisitors, awaiting their gruesome end. To hear melodious



voices singing together in a concert, stop by Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Church at the time of mass that happens every Sunday at 8am. Built in the Portuguese Baroque style in 1541, it holds the liturgy in English, Konkani, and Portuguese.

When I crossed the bridge made up of a million pieces of broken tiles to enter Fontainhas, I remember being told, "The colours on the bridge are nothing in comparison to the colours that it leads to." I did not know that sleepy lanes with bright-coloured houses, or hide and seek with multicoloured roosters, would have the power to make me smile involuntarily.

From top: The Maruti Temple in Mala neighbourhood; Fontainhas is home to quaint cafes and galleries.

FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK : GREG ELMS/ GETTYIMAGES

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Romancing *the* RAINS

As the sun makes way for thunderous clouds, India too lugs out of lazy summers to surprise its visitors with ethereal landscapes. Follow our top 10 offbeat destinations to experience the charm of travelling in the monsoons. By BINDU GOPAL RAO

IMAGERY INDIA/ALAMY

Kerala is among India's top monsoon destinations. Seen here is the Athirappilly Falls in Thrissur.

Khajjiar HIMACHAL PRADESH

A quiet hill station that has earned the moniker ‘mini Switzerland of India’, Khajjiar in Himachal Pradesh resembles a picture postcard. Surrounded by the snow-clad Himalayas and set amidst Deodar forests, the meadows of Khajjiar are as charming as they are romantic, especially during the monsoons. Start your escapade with a tour of Khajjiar Lake, which offers stunning views of Mount Kailash, and is the epicentre of native activities, such as paragliding and zorbing. The Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary, surrounded by blue pine, green oak, and rhododendron trees, and home to Himalayan black marten, leopard, jackal, bear, and barking goral, is good for a daytime visit. The Panch Pandav Tree with six shoots, which apparently represents the five Pandavas and Draupadi from the

Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, is a curious spot of attraction among visitors. However, the best way to spend a romantic holiday in Khajjiar is to take long walks in the meadows or enjoy a refreshing chai (tea) as it rains.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Kangra (134 km). Air India (airindia.in) and Spicejet (spicejet.com) operate direct flights from New Delhi and Kangra. Khajjiar is also well-connected by road with all major towns of Himachal Pradesh, such as Shimla and Manali.

STAY

Deodar Manor is a heritage property that affords stunning views of the Himalayas (*starts from ₹8,500/US\$122, deodarmenor.com*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

March to October

MUST-SEE

Visit Dainkund Peak in the neighbouring hill station of Dalhousie to enjoy views of three rivers—Chenab, Ravi, and Beas.



Kotagiri TAMIL NADU

The lesser known cousin of popular hill stations Ooty and Coonoor in Tamil Nadu, Kotagiri sits pretty in the Nilgiri biosphere at 6,000 feet above sea level. The place was a popular summer getaway among the British, and has retained its distinct colonial undertones amidst the verdant green tea estates. Among the top attractions here is the double cascade Catherine Falls, which can be reached after a short trek through tea plantations. The sacred Rangaswamy Pillar is where you'd like to head with your partner to witness ethereal views of the Nilgiris during sunset. Stop over at Kotagiri Women's Co-Operative Cottage Industrial Society to shop for gifts. The place sells unique creations by Tada (an indigenous group)

women, including saris and shawls, which make for interesting souvenirs to take back home.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Coimbatore (100 km). Direct flights operate from New Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. Book a prepaid taxi at the airport for onward journey to Kotagiri.

STAY

The Teanest Nightingale resort is tucked away amidst sprawling tea gardens and offers rooms with colonial touches (*starts from ₹4,195/US\$60, natureresorts.in*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to September

MUST-SEE

The Longwood Shola Reserve Forest offers trekking experience through picturesque shola forests.



FROM LEFT: ANAND PUROHIT/GETTY IMAGES; DETHAN PUNALUR/GETTY IMAGES

Disclaimer: The map used here is for illustrative purpose only and is not claimed to be either true or correct. The official boundary of India is as notified by the Survey of India (Map not to scale)

Lansdowne

UTTARAKHAND



A quaint hill station in the northern state of Uttarakhand, Lansdowne is emerging as a preferred destination for weekend getaways among travellers from around the world. A birdwatcher's paradise, the town is home to over 600 species of birds. Go on nature walks to hear birdsongs or take a boat ride at the lake Bhulla Tal. For a bird's eye view of the hill station, head to the Tip-In-Top or Tiffin Top point that is both, a picnic spot and a vantage view point for stunning sunrises. Park yourself here for a couple of hours, and enjoy panoramic views of the Shivalik Hills and Chaukhamba and Trishul peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya. If you love history and architecture, the St. Mary's

Church is a must-visit to admire the Victorian architecture, replete with stained-glass windows and doors.

GETTING THERE

The Jolly Grant Airport in Dehradun (117 km) is the nearest air terminal. All major airlines offer direct flights from New Delhi. Hire a prepaid taxi for the onward journey.

STAY

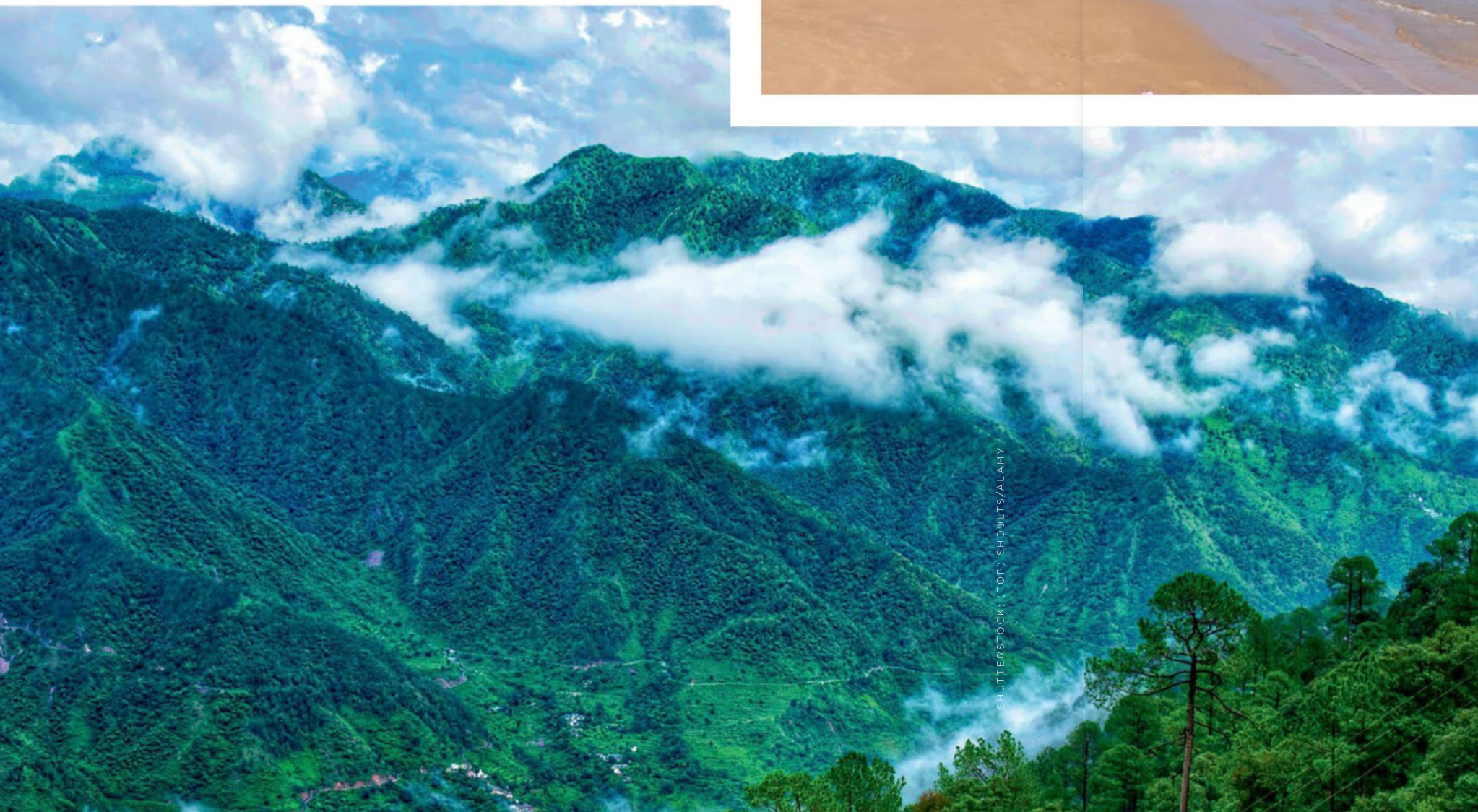
Tip N Top Resort Lansdowne offers lovely cottages and huts with unparalleled views of the mountains (*starts from ₹5,000/US\$70, tipntop.resortsinlansdowne.com*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to September

MUST-SEE

Kalagarh Tiger Reserve, situated 13 km from Lansdowne, is popular for tiger safaris. *kalagarhtigerreserve.in*



SHUTTERSTOCK (TOP), SHOUTS/ALAMY

Gokarna

KARNATAKA



If whiling away time at a balmy beach destination is your idea of spending quality time while you're travelling across India, head to Gokarna in southern Karnataka state. A relatively offbeat destination, Gokarna is blessed with a string of beaches—Om Beach, Kudle Beach, Gokarna Beach, Paradise Beach, and Belekan Beach. Beach trekking is among the popular activities here. Don't be surprised if you've the beach to yourself since holidaying crowd seldom visit the coast during monsoons. Walk around the markets and shop for silver jewellery, brass lamps, prayer beads, wall decor made of seashell as gifts for friends back home. The place also has several restaurants serving world cuisine—from Mexican, to Israeli, and Iranian.

Chez Christophe (*[facebook.com/CHEZCHRISTOFF](https://www.facebook.com/CHEZCHRISTOFF)*) offers authentic French dishes and desserts, along with live music on some nights.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Goa (160 km). Goa is connected with major international cities, besides New Delhi and Mumbai through various flights. Hire prepaid taxi at the airport for onward journey.

STAY

The Arthigamya Spa & Resort offers spacious rooms and facilities, such as spa and pool (*starts from ₹4,460/US\$64, arthigamya.co.in*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to August

MUST-SEE

Half Moon Bay is located 5 km from the main town. There are no roads, and the place is only accessible via a 20-minute hike from the Om Beach, or occasional boat rides from Gokarna.

Mahabaleshwar MAHARASHTRA

The misty little town of Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra boasts pleasant weather through the year and is a great detour from Mumbai if you're looking for some quiet time after the chaos of the metropolis. However, arrive here right before the end of monsoon to enjoy the best views. The ancient Pratapgarh Fort perched atop a spur, drenched in rain and glory alike; a pregnant Venna Lake, which gives way to the Lingmala Waterfalls; strawberry fields carpeting the landscape in bright candy red; and the mighty Sahyadri mountain range awash with different shades of green—there's no better place to experience monsoons in the Western Ghats. While the Venna Lake calls for a romantic boat ride in its vibrant *shikaras*, lush strawberry farms invite guests for an immersive berry-picking experience.

Spend some time breathing in the tranquillity at Lingmala Falls, or choose from Arthur's Seat and Elephant's Head Point to catch a rainbow peeping from behind the Sahyadri hills.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Pune (120 km). You can also opt for a five-hour drive from Mumbai (264 km) via the Mumbai-Pune Expressway.

STAY

Le Meridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa (starts from ₹12,000/US\$172, marriott.com) and Citrus Chambers Mahabaleshwar (starts from ₹10,700/US\$153, citrushotels.com) are good options.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to September

MUST SEE

Visit Mapro Garden (mapro.com) in Gureghar to feast on fresh strawberries. The fourth-century Mahabaleshwar Temple is also worth visiting for its architecture.



SHUTTERSTOCK; (TOP) PADDY PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTYIMAGES



Araku Valley ANDHRA PRADESH

If your idea of an ideal vacation is digital detox, Araku Valley in southern state of Andhra Pradesh should be on top of the list for its remote location and virgin landscapes. Start your day with a visit to the beautiful Chaparai or Dumbriguda Falls. Surrounded by thick forest cover, the place is a popular camping and swimming site. Spend the night here and watch a zillion stars take over the clear skies. In the morning, visit one of the coffee plantations in the Ananthagiri Hills and get insights into the entire process of brewing the famed Araku Coffee, which is grown by tribals

and known for its bittersweet scent. If tribal culture entices you, visit the Araku Tribal Museum to know more about the lifestyle of the 19 tribes that call the valley home. Or, stop by at the Padmapuram Botanical Garden (aptourism.gov.in) to take a toy train ride around the garden and learn about its origin that dates back to the World War II. For couples who are adventurous foodies, *bongulo* chicken is one of the prime highlights of the trip. Prepared using almost no oil and spices and merely with bamboo and coal, the local delicacy can be savoured at

small stalls set up by tribal women at popular tourist attractions.

GETTING THERE

Direct flights operate from New Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai to Visakhapatnam (115 km away). Either take a scenic train journey (tickets available on irctc.co.in) to Araku, or hire a taxi from the airport.

STAY

The Haritha Valley Resort offers a pleasant stay (starts from ₹1,700/US\$25, aptdc.gov.in).

WHEN

June to October

MUST SEE

Visit the Borra Caves and admire the stalagmite formations in different shapes that date back to thousands of years.



Minicoy LAKSHADWEEP

Ditch the more popular islands of India and plan a vacation to the Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep for an idyllic beach getaway. Take long walks on languid white-sand beaches, sunbathe under swaying palm trees, or go sailing with your partner—plenty of opportunities await at this ‘last Indian island’. Located in the southernmost tip of the archipelago, Minicoy is a crescent-shaped island, which lies closer to the Maldives than the Indian sub-continent. One of the popular attractions here includes, a British lighthouse (built in 1885) that offers astounding views of the Arabian Sea and its palm-fringed coastline. Stay put to watch an ethereal sunset or explore water sports activities, such as pedal boating and kayaking. The local tourism board (lakshadweep.gov.in) offers village

tours to give an insight into the locals’ lives, which mainly revolves around boating and fishing. The more adventurous couples can go diving to explore the three ship wrecks within eight metres depth.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Agatti. Take a direct flight from Kochi in Kerala, or book a seat on one of the passenger ships—MV Minicoy, MV Bharat Seema, MV Tippu Sultan. lakshadweep.gov.in

STAY

The Minicoy Beach Resort offers modern beachside rooms and cottages (starts from ₹6,000/US\$85, lakshadweeptourism.com).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to August

MUST SEE

Visit a tuna canning factory to buy products like tuna curry and canned tunna. ldcl.nic.in

Kumarakom KERALA

Imagine gliding through the picturesque backwaters in a houseboat as the pitter-patter of rains lend the perfect melody to your monsoon dream. At Kumarakom in Kerala, the most romantic dreams come true against the backdrop of the languid Lake Vembanad. Among the largest lakes in India, Lake Vembanad gently caresses the coastline of Kumarakom, creating a serene landscape featuring virgin backwaters, swaying palm trees, and iconic houseboats. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Prince Charles chose to celebrate his 65th birthday here with wife, Camilla.

While a houseboat ride is the most recommended activity for couples, the more outdoorsy guests can explore the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary (keralatourism.org) either through a walking trail or a boat ride. During monsoon, the place welcomes special species, such as egrets, darters, bulbuls, herons, and teals. It is recommended to go on birdwatching tours just after sun rise when the sightings are the best. The best way to make the most of a destination like Kumarakom is to check into a luxury houseboat and spend the night watching the stars.



GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Kochi (60 km). Ask the hotel concierge to arrange a pick-up from the airport.

STAY

Kumarakom Lake Resort (starts from ₹15,000/US\$215, kumarakomlakeresort.in) is a popular choice for a luxurious stay. Niraamaya Retreats Backwaters & Beyond, Kumarakom (starts from ₹14,320/US\$205, niraamaya.in) also offers comfortable stay.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to September

MUST-SEE

Visit Aruvikkuzhi (35 km from Kumarakom), a picnic spot set amidst rubber plantations.



SHUTTERSTOCK(2)

Hampi KARNATAKA

The ruins of Hampi are as poignant as they are romantic, and witness a heavy footfall of historians and international travellers who seek to trace the last remains of the erstwhile Vijayanagara kingdom. Post the arid summer, the rains are a welcome relief in this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Start exploring the place at the Vittala Temple Complex that houses the famed stone chariot—a testament to the Vijayanagara style of art and architecture. This sprawling complex with its many temples, pavilions, halls, and pillars (some of which produce musical notes) is best explored with a guide. Stop by at the Archaeological Museum of Hampi to get an insight into the might of the Vijayanagara dynasty through an

impressive collection of sculptures and antiques. Monsoons are the best time to explore Hampi since this is when the villages come to life, and the breezy weather makes it easy for travellers to explore an otherwise arid landscape.

GETTING THERE

Bellary is the nearest airport (60 km). It can be reached from Bengaluru, which offers good international connectivity.

STAY

Evolve Back, Hampi offers plush suites inspired by Vijayanagara architecture (*starts from ₹21,000/US\$300, evolveback.com*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

July to September

MUST SEE

Visit Anjanadri Hills and climb up the 500-plus steps to be rewarded with a magical sunset.



TRAVELOGRAPHER / GETTY IMAGES; (TOP) SHUTTERSTOCK



Pelling SIKKIM

At 6,250 feet above sea level, the small town of Pelling in Sikkim is where travel enthusiasts go to enjoy unparalleled views of the Kanchenjunga mountains. Plan a trip during the monsoon when rains breathe life into the breathtaking landscape. This is also a good time to avoid the mainstream crowd of tourists. Start your trip with a visit to the Pemayangtse Monastery, an old Buddhist monastery from the 17th century and a popular spiritual attraction. Spend a day in Darap Village, 8 km away, to experience bucolic life. Or, explore the Kanchenjunga Waterfalls, which originates high up in the Kanchenjunga mountains. If it's history and culture that interests you,

royalty at the Rabdentse Ruins, an erstwhile palace that offers panoramic views of the valley as well as the majestic Kanchenjunga range. While you're in this part of the country, indulge in local delicacies like *thukpa*, *thenthuk*, *momos*, and *gundruk*.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is at Bagdogra (140 km). Prepaid taxis are available at airport for onward journey.

STAY

The Elgin Mount Pandim offers comfortable accommodation in Pelling (*starts from ₹12,000/US\$170, elginhotels.com*).

BEST TIME TO VISIT

June to September

MUST SEE

The Kanchenjunga National Park is worth a visit for wildlife enthusiasts.

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Diexperience

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Mawsynram in India's northeastern state, Meghalaya, is referred to as 'Scotland of the East' (p. 84).



The River Dawki is a popular boating spot for its transparent waters.

AMIT RANE/ALAMY; OPPOSITE: SUGATHO TRIPATHY



Above: The Nohkalikai Falls in Cherrapunji is amongst the tallest plunge waterfalls in India.

INTO THE *Hinterlands*

Home to Asia's cleanest village, world's longest sandstone cave, numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and one of the wettest places on earth, **Meghalaya** in northeast India is a true surprise. Hit the road to discover an extraordinary landscape, which features ubiquitous waterfalls, picturesque lakes, and ancient living root bridges. By **SUGATHO TRIPATHY**

DAY 1

The National Highway-6 intertwined between Meghalaya and the neighbouring state, Assam, as I started my journey from Guwahati. On either side of the road and sometimes on the same, the sign boards of shops read Assam or Meghalaya—in no particular order. It took just over two hours to reach the first stop on my itinerary—Umiam Lake. It was late evening when I checked into my room at a hillside property overlooking the picturesque lake. I woke up early next morning for a walk by the lakeside followed by a gentle boat ride on the pristine waters. On enquiring about the

meaning of Umiam, my boatman Legang was eager to share a folklore involving two fairies and how one of them lost their ways here. The locals believe the lake was formed as a result of the fairy's relentless weeping. I later realised that Meghalaya is steeped in Khasi folklore and legends. As I watched the shifting shadows of the clouds and the surrounding hills on the calm waters of Umiam, like a spectacular light show, I wondered how an artificial lake built just 55 years ago can become part of popular hearsay! Next on my list was the capital city of Shillong, about an hour's drive from Umiam Lake. Besides the earthquake-resistant Cathedral Catholic

Church and the sprawling Shillong Golf Course, the city is most visited for its delectable chilly pork offerings.

Located in the heart of the city, the Cathedral Catholic Church in Laitumkhrah looks impressive. The two-storey structure, with its pale blue exteriors, tall arches, and stained windows, is built on a combination of sand and rocky platform for greater elasticity and flexibility during earthquakes. Inside, German terracotta installations depict scenes from the life of Jesus, while refractive coloured glass windows, brought from France, light up the space in myriad shades. A short drive away is the Shillong Golf Course—one of the oldest natural golf circuits in the world. It was designed in 1898 by the British to escape the hotter months elsewhere in India. Surrounded by pine and rhododendron trees, the circuit is open to tourists and the perfect place to lounge on the fine grassland and end your first day in Shillong on a pleasant note.

DAY 2 The capital is the ideal base to drive to one of the wettest places on earth, Cherrapunji (55 km) or to dine with the locals in Asia's cleanest village, Mawlynnong

Below: The plains of Bangladesh as seen from the East Khasi Hills in Cherrapunji. *Opposite, from top:* The Cathedral Catholic Church is an earthquake-resistant structure; chilly pork is the most popular delicacy of Meghalaya.

(80 km) or row on the clear waters of River Dawki along the Bangladesh border (40 km from Mawlynnong). I chose to explore Cherrapunji first. As I drove along the East Khasi Hills, with every bend the landscape changed—ravines, rolling hills, and ubiquitous waterfalls welcomed wide-eyed visitors. A dark grey cloud surrounded by its fairer companions hovered over the distant hills and kept chasing my car as I entered Cherrapunji. It was an invigorating moment. As I lowered my glass windows and looked outside, the first droplet grazed my eyelashes. I was waiting for some unrestrained downpour that would add a touch of credibility to a good monsoon story. But nature had other plans—at the end of the day, I realised the first raindrop to fall on me was actually the last one! However, Cherrapunji is much more than just clouds and rainfall.

As you drive from Shillong, take the diversion off the Sohra-Shellia Road, just 5 km before Cherrapunji, to reach the magnificent Nohkalikai Falls. Falling straight as an arrow from a height of 1,000 feet, this is the most breathtaking sight in Cherrapunji. The blue puddle is a unique feature of the waterfall and is best viewed on a bright sunny

DESIGN PICS INC/ALAMY; OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: FRIEDRICH STARK/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK



LOCALS' TAKE

- **Taste different versions of chilly pork:** Try the grilled pork at Police Bazaar street in Shillong. An unnamed eatery, next to Don Bosco Museum, serves Meghalayan Smoked Pork (a local favourite). Don't forget to try pork momo from street vendors.
- **Krem Puri:** The world's longest sandstone cave (25 km approx.) is 90 km from Shillong. Discovered in 2016, the site is popular among cave enthusiasts.
- **The Balancing Rock:** Situated in Mawlynnong, this is a wonder of nature where a small stone balances a huge boulder and has remained, since centuries, unperturbed by rain or wind. Locals believe it to be an ancient shrine, which lost its significance over the years.
- **Indulge in Jadoh:** A sweet and sour local delicacy made with rice, mint, ginger and pork—it's one of the most popular dishes of Meghalaya. It's sold both, on Police Bazaar street and near Don Bosco Museum.



day. A nominal fee of less than a dollar is required to enter the hill top (which offers the best views). The more adventurous travellers can undertake a two-hour trek downhill to reach the base of the waterfall, where local Khasi women sell souvenirs, jute hats, puffed masala rice (a local snack), bells, and trinkets—a reminder of Meghalaya's matrilineal culture.

A 45-minute drive from Nohkalikai, through the small town of Cherrapunji, took me to Mawsmi Caves, where for the first time, I discovered my unknown anxiety for constrained spaces. Walking through a 150-metre-long, dark cave with natural limestone formation, cranky bridges over underground streams, and the occasional attendance of bats, can be quite challenging. And I thought cramped aeroplane seats were the only place where I had an anatomical issue! A few kilometres from here is the Thangkharang Park that offers breathtaking vantage points. From the 220-feet tall Khoh Ramah rock, to the meandering rivers



cutting across the Bangladesh plains, and a spectacular view of the 1,000-foot high Kynrem waterfalls—the experience is unforgettable.

End your day at the beautiful Eco Park built on the edge of a cliff. Set up by the state government on top of a plateau, it houses indigenous orchids and a golden expanse of autumnal grassland. It offers magnificent views of the surrounding Khasi Hills and the Sylhet plains of Bangladesh with which Meghalaya shares more than 400 km of border. More often than not, strong gusts of wind bring greyish white clouds to this place, which engulfs the entire valley.

DAY 3 Touted as Asia’s cleanest village, Mawlynnong is a three-hour drive from Cherrapunji. Close to the Bangladesh border, cleanliness is a way of life for the villagers. Here, almost every house sports a lovely flower bed in their courtyard. The pathways are impeccably clean and one would struggle to find even a single piece of paper or plastic on the ground. Beautiful bamboo dustbins are placed at every nook and corner of the village. Food is humble with the options of roti/rice, fish, potato, carrots, and ladyfinger. Most of the supplies come from Bangladesh except potato, which is a local produce. I wondered what else the villagers do apart from attending to tourists. What about agriculture? “The villagers cultivate betel plant,



GETTING THERE & AROUND

Though Shillong has a small airport, it is advised to fly into Guwahati, Assam (3 hrs from Shillong). Direct flights operate from Kolkata, Delhi and Bengaluru to Guwahati. Rent a car from a local agency, like Zoom Car (zoomcar.com), in Guwahati and go on a self-drive. The days are short in this part of the world; therefore, deciding the day-to-day itinerary requires good planning.

WHEN
November to May

STAY
Ri Kynjai- Serenity by the Lake is located on a hill slope and offers wonderful views

of the Umiyam Lake. Starts from ₹9,500/US\$135, rikynjai.com

Hotel Polo Towers is situated in the heart of the city, and among the few luxurious options available. Starts from ₹7,200/US\$102, hotelpolotowersshillong.com

Polo Orchid Resort is the only luxury property in the small town of Cherrapunji, and comes with a rooftop pool overlooking the mountains. Starts from ₹9,500/US\$135, polocherrapunjee.com

Cherrapunjee Holiday Resort is a family-run nature resort in the village of Laitkynsew. The hotel staff comprises locals who offer valuable insights about the area and trekking paths. Starts from ₹4,650/US\$66, cherrapunjee.com



Clockwise, from above: Kayaking is a popular activity in the Umiyam Lake; Polo Orchid Resort is among the handful luxury hotels in the city; the iconic Living Roots bridge in Cherrapunji.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: AMOS CHAPPLE/ GETTY IMAGES; HERCULES MILAS/ALAMY; COURTESY OF POLO CHERRAPUNJEE

pineapple, black pepper, and other local fruits—portions of which is also sold across the border,” a local school teacher, Khongothrem, informed me, adding that the proceeds from the parking fee of ₹100/US\$1.5 per vehicle (outside the village), is directed towards the village cleansers.

Just outside the entrance of the village is The Bamboo Sky Walk. An eco-friendly staircase-like structure made of bamboo, tree branches, and jute—the site offers a bird’s eye view of the Bangladesh plains. Ten minutes away is the Living Roots Bridge. Built over centuries by the local tribes, Khasi and Jaintia, the natural bridge is used for easy commute within the forest. The process involves the intertwining of the roots of a particular rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) on raised river banks and takes around 15-20 years. There are several other living root bridges across the state that are classified as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Most of these require four to five-hours trek and a bit of determination and fitness. The trek to

the famed Double Decker Bridge starts at Tyrna Village (30 minutes from Cherrapunji) and descends down to 2,400 ft.

DAY 4 The River Umngot flows from India to Bangladesh through the last border town of Dawki (35 km from Mawlynnong) in Meghalaya. One must reserve an entire day to fall in love with the transparent water of the river here. At some places, the river bed is visible upto 10-12 feet below. It’s a popular spot for boating and an emerging destination of interest among photographers from around the world.

On my way back to Shillong, I realised Meghalaya deserves so much more than a four-day or even a week-long trip. With waterfalls everywhere, each with a tale of its own; thousands of ancient old cave systems, each with an ecosystem of their own, and innumerable living root bridges hidden away in gorgeous forest covers, there’s a barely a land more mystical than Meghalaya. **D**

Taste of INDIA

Indian thalis, or set meals, are as varied and diverse as the land and the people themselves. *Chef Abhinanda Bhattacharya* tells you how.

THE INDIAN food theory says that our menus comprise six distinct flavours: sweet, salty, bitter, sour, astringent, and spicy. The thali beautifully captures this philosophy, irrespective of its place of origin. Every Indian state boasts its own prolific circular platter of bowls filled with goodness and culture. Here, the thalis reflect the souls of the people. You soak in the essence of grandmotherly tête-à-têtes as you navigate through the dishes. Each recipe has a story—try and capture the balance of flavours and understand the science behind it. And in doing so, you truly learn about India.



SHUTTERSTOCK

A typical Indian thali can feature anything from five to 50 ingredients.

Bold Flavours of the North

The earliest thali, a metal plate on which food is served, was found in the archaeological site of Mohenjo-Daro. This excavation site is in present day Pakistan, close to northern India. A front runner among north India's culinary offerings, the Punjabi thali offers naan, *chhole* (chickpea curry), a potato preparation, *raita* (yogurt with spices, cucumber, and other vegetables), *papad* (a flat, round, spiced lentil preparation), pickle (mostly mango and mustard), and for dessert, gulab jamun. The famous Himachali thali, on the other hand, contains *babru* (bread made from black gram dal), *khatta* (small lentil balls seasoned with spices), *channa madra* (another kind of chickpea curry cooked in yogurt), *aloo palda* (potatoes cooked in yogurt), *chhachha* (raw mango pickle), and *meetha bhaath* (sweetened rice). Whereas in Kashmir, the the multi-course *wazwan* is an artistic array with robust delicacies, such as *kebab nadir shahi* (lotus root combined with mango sheets), *rajma risemise* (red kidney beans in a subtle gravy), *tabak maaz* (tossed lamb ribs), *gosht yakhani* (a coriander-flavoured mutton pulao), soured brinjal, *Kashmiri dum aloo* (small potatoes in a thick gravy), Kashmiri pulao and raita (yogurt with grated bottle gourd). Rose- and pistachio-infused *phirni* (pudding), set in an earthen dish, seals the deal.

TASTE IT HERE

Punjabi by Nature (punjabibynature.in) is a popular restaurant chain across Delhi-NCR. Ask for naan and lather it with butter and minced garlic for a comforting experience. The state-run Himachal Bhawan (hptdc.in) in central Delhi offers an authentic experience. If you're planning to visit for lunch, reach the venue well in advance to get a table. The Kashmiri *wazwan* is best enjoyed with a local family at their home.

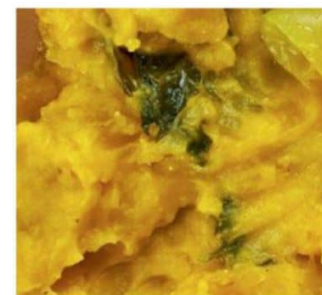


Eastern Odyssey

The *aalohir exaj* or the Assamese thali is served on bell metal vessels. The experience begins with a dish called *khar* (prepared with dried banana skin) followed by generous doses of *torkari* (vegetable mix), *maasor anja* (fish curry), and *mandxor jol* (meat or chicken preparation). While *bhaat* (steamed rice) is the staple, rice-based dessert *pitha* is equally popular. In neighbouring West Bengal, locals eat their meals in courses, starting with bitter and ending with the sweet, as spicy, savoury and astringent flavours lace the mid courses.

TASTE IT HERE

In Guwahati, order pork or duck thali at Mising Kitchen (24, 1st Floor, Hengrabari Road) for a no-frills experience. Oh! Calcutta (speciality.co.in) is the most popular Bengali restaurant chain outside of West Bengal.



Secrets of the West

If you head straight across the country, westwards through central India, you might land on low hand-painted seats with glittering platters of colourful food placed before you in *dhabas* or roadside food stalls. In Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat or Maharashtra, the thalis reflect local culture, history, climate, as well as culinary habits of the past. In Rajasthan, the arid climate and a history of wars have influenced gourmet preparations. For instance, longer-lasting grains like millets and pulses constitute fabulous breads. *Dal bati churma*—deep-fried flour roundels served with dal and dollops of ghee—is an integral part of the thali. It is cooked using minimal water, reflecting the water scarcity in the region.

The Gujarati thali, on the other hand, features at least three fresh vegetable dishes, one dry dal or sprouted pulse, a wet dal, *kadhi* (yogurt curry), puris and rotis (breads), khichri (similar to kedgeree), *chaash* (buttermilk), and papad. The Kathiyawadi

variant of the thali is the spicier cousin with generous use of onion and garlic; it is generally served with *tadela marcha* or fried green chillies.

Onwards to Maharashtra, you find the *purogami* (liberal-thinking) Marathi culture reflected in the thali. The cuisine is slightly austere, subtle, and sophisticated. The thali contains salads, mild and spicy dishes, breads prepared with jowar (sorghum flour), bajra (pearl millet) and wheat, meats that are region specific, and *sooji halwa* (semolina dessert). *Thalipect* (a multigrain pancake) and *aloo vadi* (a fried snack) are brilliant accompaniments, lending the meal an eclectic character.



TASTE IT HERE


In Jaipur, visit Chokhi Dhani (chokhidhani.com) and in Ahmedabad, Rajwadu (rajwadu.com) for Rajasthani and Gujarati thalis, respectively. If you're in Mumbai, check out Shree Thaker Bhojanalay ([facebook.com/ShreeThaker1945](https://www.facebook.com/ShreeThaker1945)) for its Gujarati thali. In the summer months, the restaurant adds *aam ras* (Alphonso mango pulp) as part of the thali. For a Maharashtrian experience, try the non-vegetarian thali at Sadichha (*B-5, Gandhi Nagar, Bandra East*) and the vegetarian variant at Aaswad (*61, Sadanand, Dadar West*) in Mumbai.



Southern Rendezvous

As you travel south, the word 'meal' replaces 'thali'. Each of the southern state boasts bold and classic cuisines, with very few overlapping dishes. The interiors of Karnataka offers a kaleidoscopic array of *vangi baath* (brinjal rice), *chitranna* (carrot pulao), *kosambri* (salad spiked with asafoetida), *heerakai* or *tondekay palya* (gourd curry), *tarkari bele sambar* (a lentil curry with drumstick and other vegetables), *rasam* (a thin, flavourful soup), *hagalakayi* (dry bitter gourd), *roti*, *raita*, and *payasam* (rice pudding).

Kerala and Tamil Nadu offer exquisite meals served on banana leaves. Seafood and meat cooked with curry leaves and pepper accompany intrinsic curries, pickles, and sambar, with yogurt to help soothe the stomach before a ghee-soaked dessert.

Ending with *bobbatlu* (a kind of sweet) and tapioca kheer (milk-based pudding), the Andhra thali is abundant with curries and dry sautés, *garelu* (a doughnut-shaped fried snack), *charu rasam* (a thin soup), *annam* (white rice), lemon rice, *pappu* (dal), *gongura* (a kind of leaf) pickle, a red stout fried chilli, and *perugu* (yogurt). 

TASTE IT HERE

In Bengaluru, eat a north *Kannadiga* thali at Kamat Yatri Nivas (kamatyatri.in); a Kerala thali at Karavali, Taj Gateway (tajhotels.com); and an Andhra thali at Bheema's (*31, Asha Building, Church Street*). In Chennai, Ponnusamy (ponnusamyhotel.com) offers the largest Tamil thali named the Bahubali thali. In Hyderabad, Ulavacharu (ulavacharu.in) at Jubilee Hills is a must-stop to savour an authentic Andhra thali.

Some photographs have been used for representational purpose only.

TALES of FORTS & PALACES

The desert city of **Bikaner** has layers of history woven into its many forts and palaces. Get ready to be bedazzled. By **BINDU GOPAL RAO**



Junagarh Fort in Bikaner is amongst the tallest icons of red sandstone architecture in India.

“DID YOU KNOW BIKANER HAS OVER A THOUSAND OLD MANSIONS?”

When my tour guide rolled out the list, I, am stumped! Soon, I discover that this isn't the only thing I didn't know about this desert city in Rajasthan.

FORT FIXATION

Established by Rao Bikaji, son of Rao Jodhaji, the kingdom of Bikaner was founded in AD 1448. I start my exploration of the desert city at the 16th-century Junagarh Fort, whose foundation was laid by Rai Singh, the sixth ruler of Bikaner. The fort has housed 20 rulers up until 1942, with each one's substantial contribution to its present form. Karan Mahal, Gaj Mandir, and Phul Mahal (all inside the fort complex), for instance, were built by the 14th ruler, Gaj Singh; Anoop Mahal was conceived by the 17th ruler, Suraj Singh; and Chhatar Mahal was the brainchild of the 20th maharaja, Dungar Singh. The 10th ruler, Anoop Singh, added statues of various gods and goddesses from the Deccan during his campaigns with Aurangzeb and also brought in Sanskrit manuscripts and other valuable books. In 1963, Junagarh Fort was donated to a trust by Karni Singh, the 23rd and last maharaja of Bikaner, who created the Maharaja Rai Singhji Trust (maharajagangasinghjiitrust.org.in), which later opened the fort to the public.

Junagarh Fort has witnessed several battles, but no enemy was ever able to breach its fortification. It is one of the most well-maintained forts in the state and has an iconic red sandstone façade. The complex is well laid out, with an eclectic mix of palaces constructed in red sandstone and marble, with numerous open courtyards, ornate lattice windows, intricate carvings, frescoes, wooden ceilings, lacquerwork, filigree designs, stone carvings, mirror-work, and beautiful archways. Here, at Ganga Mahal you can see a restored biplane—one of the two models used by the British during World War I and donated by the British to Maharaja Ganga Singh. Visitors to the fort are also advised to check out the Prachina Museum in the premises, with its display of traditional textiles, jewels, arms, and royal portraits.

EXPLORING THE WALLED CITY

For a lesson in history and to admire the beautiful architecture of Bikaner's famed mansions, or havelis as they are called here, head to the old city. Bikaner is a walled city, surrounded by a stone wall with five gates. Walking through the narrow, labyrinthine lanes is the best way to admire the ornamental façades of these grand havelis. Built between the 17th- and early 20th-centuries, and owned by business tycoons, these forts combine Rajput and Mughal architectural styles with British colonial detailing. The intricate stone latticework, overhanging eaves, and enclosed balconies make for a compelling sight.

The walled city is a photographer's delight, and easily the most Instagrammed place in Bikaner. Today, while most of these grand mansions are being preserved, quite a few are being razed to the ground. While most of the



Above: The Bikaner Palace has been converted into a heritage hotel. Left: The tall fortifications of Bikaner Fort houses 37 palaces alongside several pavilions and temples.

MILIND TORNEY/GETTYIMAGES;
BOTTOM: GUILLAUME CHANSON/GETTYIMAGES



A whopping 40,000 kg of ghee, instead of water, was used to construct the Bhandasar Jain Temple.



havelis are locked up, do take out time to visit the ornate Bhanwar Nivas, one among the several havelis belonging to the affluent merchant family of Rampurias. Built in 1927, and now a hotel, it is one of the grandest havelis in the city. Its awe-inspiring interiors feature several artworks, antiques, portraits, and stonework. The older part of the haveli houses a workshop on *Usta* art. An umbrella term for art forms like *Naqqashi* and *Manoti*, *Usta* art work can be seen on the walls of several structures of the Junagarh Fort, such as Anup Mahal, Phool Mahal, and Karan Mahal.

CAMEL COUNTRY

Located in the northeastern part of Rajasthan in the Thar Desert, Bikaner is also known as camel country. You see camels everywhere; camel carts are routinely spotted on the roads as well. The sand dunes are the perfect place to enjoy a camel ride, if that interests you. However, a visit to the world's largest camel research and breeding farm, the National Research Centre on Camel (nrccamel.icar.gov.in), comes highly recommended to learn interesting facts about the mammal, or sample products made from camel milk, including textured kulfi ice cream and the yoghurt-based *lassi* drink.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Bikaner has many monuments, including the royal cenotaphs at Devikund Sagar, the cremation grounds of the royal family. The earliest cenotaph is of Rao Kalyanmal and the last one built in ode to Karni Singh. The earlier cenotaphs have been constructed in Dulmera red sandstone, while marble has been used for the

EMMEPI IMAGES/ALAMY. (TOP) SHUTTERSTOCK; OPPOSITE : MICHELE FALZONE/ GETTYIMAGES



Left: The 15th-century Bhandasar Jain Temple features intriguing sculptures. Opposite, from top: The Junagarh Palace complex is laid out with open courtyards, ornate windows, intricate stone carvings, and beautiful archways; rats are fed and worshipped at the Karni Mata Temple.

SPIRITUAL SOJOURN

The Karni Mata Temple, usually referred to as the 'rat temple', is another stop that deserves the visitors' time. Located on the outskirts of the city in Deshnok, this temple has a large façade of stone and marble. The main deity here, Karni Mata, is believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Durga. Rats, also referred to as *kabbas*, are revered here and it is common to see people feeding them. While these 'royal rats' are harmless, do take care not to hurt them. The locals consider the sighting of a white rat auspicious.

Another notable temple is the Bhandasar Jain Temple located at the southwest end of the walled city. It dates back to the 15th century and is dedicated to the fifth Jain *tirthankar* (teacher). Legend has it that a whopping 40,000 kilograms of ghee, instead of water, was used to construct this temple. The leaf paintings, frescoes, and intricate mirror work on the walls make it an interesting stop for architecture-lovers. Look up at the ceiling to see intricate images of several of the *tirthankars* painted amid beautiful floral motifs.




From above: A woman performs the famous Kalbelia dance; men dressed in traditional attire at the Bikaner Camel Festival. Opposite: The white-marble cenotaph at Devkund Sagar, the cremation site for the Bikaner royal family.

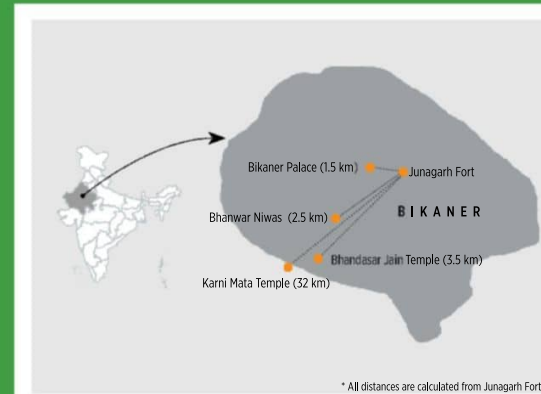


later ones. The best cenotaph belongs to Anoop Singh, with 16 pillars and carvings showing the life of Hindu god, Lord Krishna, as well as bird and animal motifs. Locally known as *chhatris*, the cenotaphs of males are denoted by a vertical memorial slab, while the female cenotaphs have footprints engraved on a slab.

The Ganga Government Museum in Shardul stands proud with its archaeological finds from the Harappa and Gupta periods. Its an informative stop to learn about Rajput weaponry, the famed blue pottery of Jaipur, and lithographs from the first war of independence. The Rajasthan State Archives (rsad.rajasthan.gov.in), a favourite with researchers and academicians who come here to study the ancient administrative records preserved here, features intriguing digitised records from the Mughal era.

LOCAL SOIRÉE

Hire a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage, known as a *tonga* to explore the bustling local markets. The ride not only lets one navigate the narrow lanes fairly easily, but is also a good way to take in the sights and smells, and insights into the local community from a different perspective. Bikaner has a rich food culture that merits an exploration in itself. Some interesting pit stops include Chunnilal Tanwar's shop on Old Jail Road for *sherbet*, a local drink made from the extracts of fresh flowers like jasmine, rose, screw pine, and sandalwood. Also try the condensed milk dessert called *rabdi* at Manka Maharaj in Joshiwara, and the fried savoury, *kachori* at Chai Patti. 



GETTING THERE

All major airlines operate direct flights to Bikaner from New Delhi and Jaipur.

STAY

Gaj Kesri is a beautiful property modelled on the lines of a palace in the outskirts of the city (starts from ₹6,000/US\$86, gajkesri.com). Bhanwar Niwas is one of the grandest havelis belonging to the Rampuria family. Built in 1927, each room here is different in terms of size

and design (starts from ₹6,000/US\$86, bhanwarniwas.com).

 **BEST TIME TO VISIT**
October to March

 **IDEAL FOR**
Families with kids

MUST-SEE

A visit to Bikaji Foods International is recommended to watch popular Rajasthani snacks being prepared using traditional methods. bikaji.in

Call of The East

Snuggled away in the northwestern corner of Arunachal Pradesh, **Tawang Valley** is fringed with magnificent peaks, Buddhist *gompas*, wild streams, and verdant greenery. Patiently waiting at the end of a long spectacular route up from the Brahmaputra plains, getting to this virgin land is an adventure in itself.

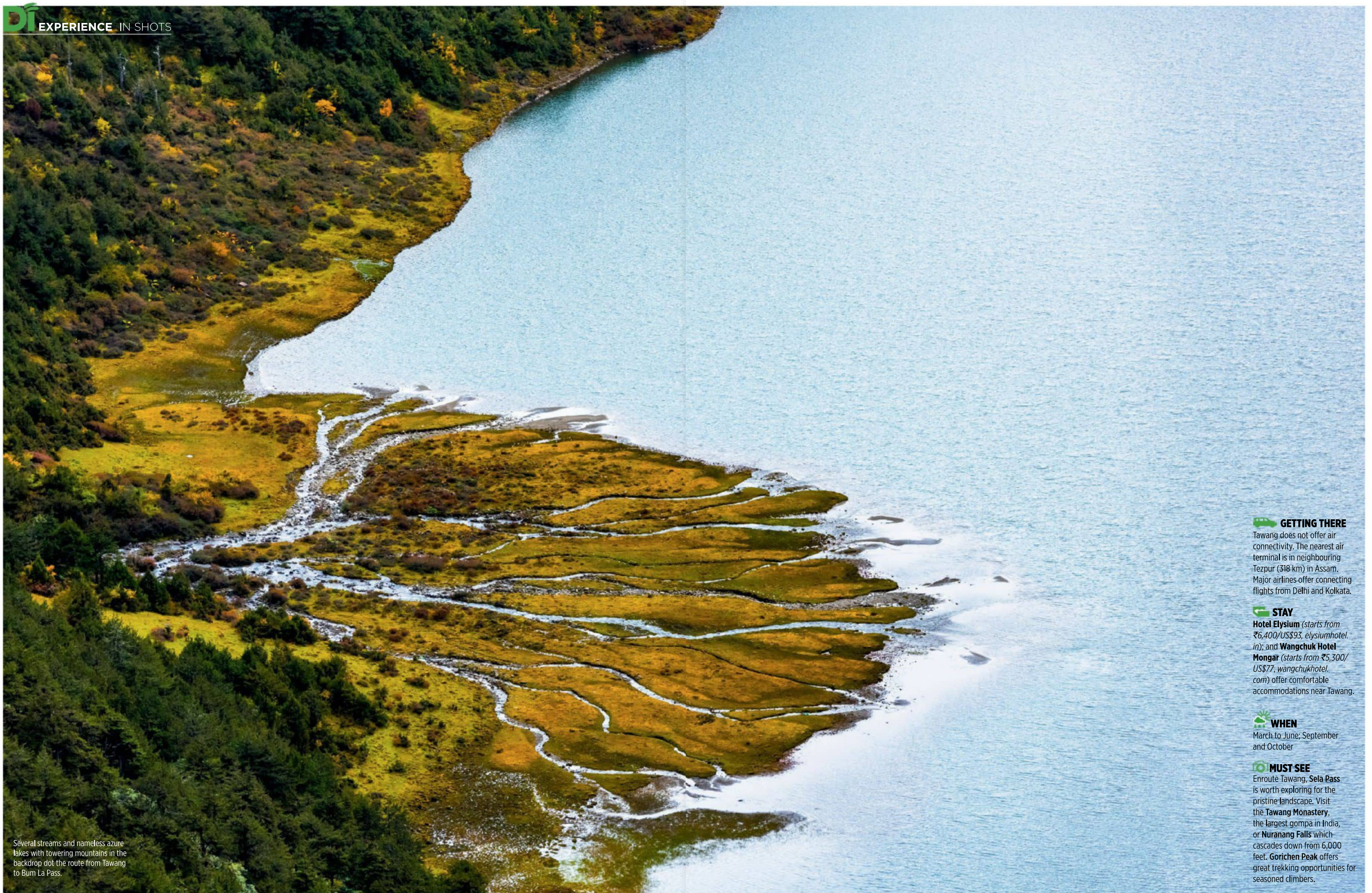
Photographed by **SUMAN KUMAR RAJU RUDRARAJU**

Sunrise is the best time
to enjoy the breathtaking
landscape of Tawang.



Clockwise from left: The route to Bum La Pass is carpeted with pink and red rhododendrons, and is a sight to behold; River Kameng weaves through the picturesque township of Tawang; the sky turns into a riot of colours as the sun sets behind the eastern Himalayan mountains.





Several streams and nameless azure lakes with towering mountains in the backdrop dot the route from Tawang to Bum La Pass.

GETTING THERE

Tawang does not offer air connectivity. The nearest air terminal is in neighbouring Tezpur (318 km) in Assam. Major airlines offer connecting flights from Delhi and Kolkata.

STAY

Hotel Elysium (starts from ₹6,400/US\$93, [elysiumhotel.in](#)); and **Wangchuk Hotel Mongar** (starts from ₹5,300/US\$77, [wangchukhotel.com](#)) offer comfortable accommodations near Tawang.

WHEN

March to June; September and October

MUST SEE

Enroute Tawang, **Sela Pass** is worth exploring for the pristine landscape. Visit the **Tawang Monastery**, the largest gumpa in India, or **Nuranang Falls** which cascades down from 6,000 feet. **Gorichen Peak** offers great trekking opportunities for seasoned climbers.



Clockwise from left: Reared by the Brokpa community, Arunachali yaks are characterised by high fat content in their milk; the mystical Sangester Tso was formed by a flash flood after an earthquake in 1950; the agricultural farmlands near the India-Bhutan border in Tawang.



ANYTHING ELSE, *just isn't*

Cricket



Cricket in India isn't just about boundaries and bouncers; it's about travel, too. SIMON CLAYS is one of the newest members of Delhi's expat cricket side, The Viceroy's, and starting to discover the joys of an undiscovered Delhi, and the prospect of seeing a very different India.

SHIV AHUJA, OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: SHUTTERSTOCK

I'M CONVINCED THAT PRETTY MUCH EVERY READER OF *DISCOVER INDIA*

stopped in their tracks when they reached the opening picture of this feature. What are a bunch of fat, bald men caught in catatonic suspension in cricket kit doing in a travel magazine?

I'll tell you, because I play (loose terminology!) for The Viceroy's. We travel. Cricket travels. It has to, otherwise, it's a dozen or so blokes in silly equipment with infrequent or no opposition. Since The Viceroy's were formed in 2011, they've journeyed the length and breadth of India, and played at some of the country's most famous and architecturally beautiful grounds. One might argue, the planet's. They are tourist attractions in themselves. They live and breathe history. They sit with wicket and bail, within it.

Let's take Roshanara Club in Delhi. It's wedged just north of Old Delhi Railway station and Civil Lines. Until I was invited to play as part of The Viceroy's team a month



From top: Viceroy's representing Canada and Australia wait for the rest of the side to arrive for the 2019 match at this magnificent Delhi ground; The Mughal market that marks either side of the grand entrance to Delhi's Red Fort is just an auto ride away from the Roshanara Club. Opposite: The usual eclectic cross-section of nations gather together to celebrate the taking of a wicket.

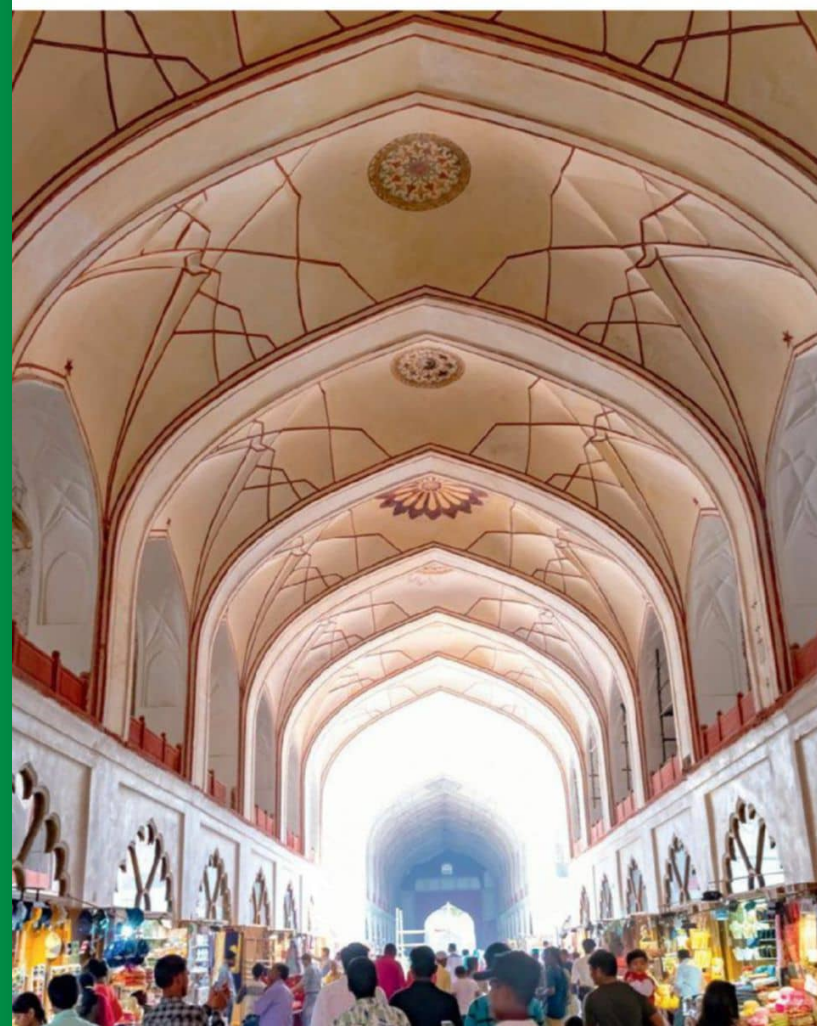
back, I'd never even heard of it. That's after 10 years living here. I'll wager my best batting figures, you haven't either.

Okay, so I wasn't betting much (right now around five or six), but the point is that one of the city's most beautiful hangovers from colonial times sits there, encircled by an exquisite Mughal garden founded by Emperor Shah Jahan and fringed by markets etched in history. Pop by. Visit. Watch a match, perhaps.

You may last longer than I did. A two ball duck. A dropped catch and one over for around 23 runs were my very limited contribution to the afternoon. Though, I did console myself in the marvellous old clubhouse, a few cold beers and the knowledge that legends like Sir Jack Hobbs have graced the pitch.

The same can be said of The Viceroy's and their travels all across India. We've played at the Cricket Club of India, Mumbai with its incredible art deco pavilion; the Secunderabad Club in Hyderabad with its stunning interiors, and the Calcutta Cricket & Football Club in Kolkata—a club founded in 1792 and the donor of the famous Calcutta Cup (awarded to winner of the England versus Scotland rugby union match).

I'd argue that the contribution of these fabulous institutions are just as worthy of your attention as any of the most famous monuments in the cities I've mentioned. At each of these grounds, you will





A Viceroy's team photo at the entrance to the incredible pavilion at Mumbai's ICC.

"We've played at the CCI, Mumbai, the Secunderabad Club in Hyderabad, and the Calcutta Cricket & Football Club in Kolkata."

witness how India has changed over the last two centuries. The names in the first XI's shifting from mixed to largely English to totally Indian; the geographical positions; how the nation has evolved.

But back to the Viceroy's. Don't let any of these prestigious grounds let the idea seep into you that we might be any good. As I write, we have not won in 11, the odds, look likely that by the time this article finally reaches the stands, it'll be more like 12 or 13.

But that's not the point of The Viceroy's. We play our Saturday morning games at schools grounds and our night games at a floodlit university pitch.

Playing for The Viceroy's is a little like being part of a Dirty Dozen. On occasion, a Baker's Dozen. But I've never played with the same group of guys more than once. We come from all over the world. Of course, there's the usual Australian suspects and a handful of Brits, a fair few repatriated NRIs too, but

THE FAR PAVILION: WHAT GOES ON TOUR... STAYS

Whether you're playing or watching, India has some fabulous cricketing establishments. The Viceroy's have been lucky enough to be hosted at some of the finest grounds in the country.

ROSHANARA CRICKET CLUB, DELHI

Guru Hanuman Marg, Roshanara Garden, Shakti Nagar, Delhi 7; roshanaracub.com

PLAY: Post-Independence, Roshanara was where the seeds of the modern BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) were sown.

STAY: In keeping with the colonial feel, **The Imperial Hotel** (theimperialindia.com) with its elegant art deco fascia and sculptured lawns is just 20-25 minutes' drive from the ground.

The Park (theparkhotels.com) on Parliament Street is a funkier, more playful option. There are plenty of safe and clean budget options available, like **Bloom Rooms** (staybloom.com).

EAT: Connaught Place is packed with eateries; **United Coffee House** (unitedcoffeehouse.in) is a multi-cuisine and, at over 75 years old, stands as the city's first European style café. For a taste of Old Delhi the legendary **Karim's** (karimhotels.in) is in touching distance from the ground.

THE CRICKET CLUB OF INDIA, BRABOURNE, MUMBAI

Veer Nariman Road, Churchgate, Mumbai 20; thecricketclubofindia.com

PLAY: Spectacular is the only word to describe the Brabourne. From its first-rate facilities to its full-on stadia feel, the CCI is truly jaw dropping. It is a members club, but if you are affiliated to any of the better-known associations (Delhi Gymkhana, Madras Cricket Club, Calcutta Club), or have a contact that is happy to host you, go. It's incredible.

STAY: **The Taj Mahal Palace** (tajhotels.com), for the luxury end of market, is a short taxi away. Slightly further afield, Lower Parel has the **ITC Grand Central** (itshotels.in), **The St. Regis Mumbai** (marriott.com), and **Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai** (fourseasons.com).

EAT: The legendary **Leopold Café** (**Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Colaba Causeway**) still bares the pock marks of the 26/11 terrorism attack. **Maresh** (mareshlunchhome.com) in Juhu is a favourite for its amazing fresh crab curry.

SECUNDERABAD CLUB, HYDERABAD

Beside Jubilee Bus Station, 220 Picket, Secunderabad, Telangana; secunderabadclub.org

PLAY: Established by the British in 1878, The Secunderabad Club is one of the oldest cricket clubs in the country. It is housed in a 22 acre-campus and is home to trees that are over 100 years old. The Main Club House was recently awarded heritage status by the local administration. It's probably the only Members' Club to have its own dedicated Sailing Annexe.

STAY: **Vivanta by Taj** (tajhotels.com) is just 15 minutes away and is centrally located in Banjara Hills. For a more moderate fee, **The Purple Leaf Hotel** (thepurpleleafhotels.com) is a steal.

EAT: The club has great facilities, if available to you. If not, then The **Paradise Hotel** (paradisefoodcourt.in) is a smash for biryani and a favourite of cricketer, Gautam Gambhir when he is in town. **Al Fresco** in Taj Krishna (tajhotels.com) offers the best Italian cuisine in town.

BITS PILANI GOA CAMPUS, GOA

NH 17B, Bypass Road, Zuarinagar, Pilani, Sancoale, Goa 403726; universe.bits-pilani.ac.in/Goa

PLAY: The BITS Goa Campus has a BCCI recognised cricket ground. Its maintained by the Goa Cricket Association and has hosted several national tournaments. The Vijay Hazare Trophy is probably one of the better known competitions that takes place there.

STAY: **Bloom Rooms** (staybloom.com) in Calangute offers well-appointed rooms. Otherwise, for those with deeper pockets, the **ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa** (itshotels.in) is just 20 minutes away. A little further afield, in North Goa, the **Grand Hyatt Goa** (hyatt.com) is one of the best-appointed properties in the state, overlooking the stunning waters of the Bambolim Bay.

EAT: There's shacks a plenty, but **Vivenda Dos Palhaços** (vivendagoa.com) is a sweet, laid back place that serves up excellent local cuisine. For a more indulgent experience, head to **Martins Corner** (martinscornergoa.com) for the freshest and tastiest seafood platters.



Opposite, clockwise from top left: The last time the Viceroy's visited Jodhpur, the Maharaja himself came along to watch; Team photo against the Victoria Monument in Kolkata; Yes, there are trophies for all manner of performance; Viceroy's on tour at the Gateway of India; touring Kolkata in the iconic yellow taxi is a fond memory from the tour; Viceroy's stand in front of a plaque dedicated to English cricket legend Sir Jack Hobbs at Roshanara Club, Delhi; The team even has sponsors in PayTM and hotel chain Bloom Rooms; tours very often include wives and children. (Centre) The team awards players special Viceroy's badged caps. These are often given on tour.

GRAHAM CROUCH. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM CENTRE: SHIV AHUJA



The Viceroy's have toured overseas. This was taken during a trip to Nepal, but the team has also played in Thailand, Hong Kong, and London.



That one came right out of the middle.

there's also any number of islands of the Caribbean represented and a growing number of nations not noted for their cricket. I played in a side under flood lights that featured no less than five Americans, a Canadian, and even a German.

We come from all walks of life, too—hobbles in my case; I'm carrying a dodgy ankle. As an expat side, of course there's always been a rich vein of the Diplomatic corps running through the team, but again as the stream of awareness about the club has rippled through the city, so has its diversification.

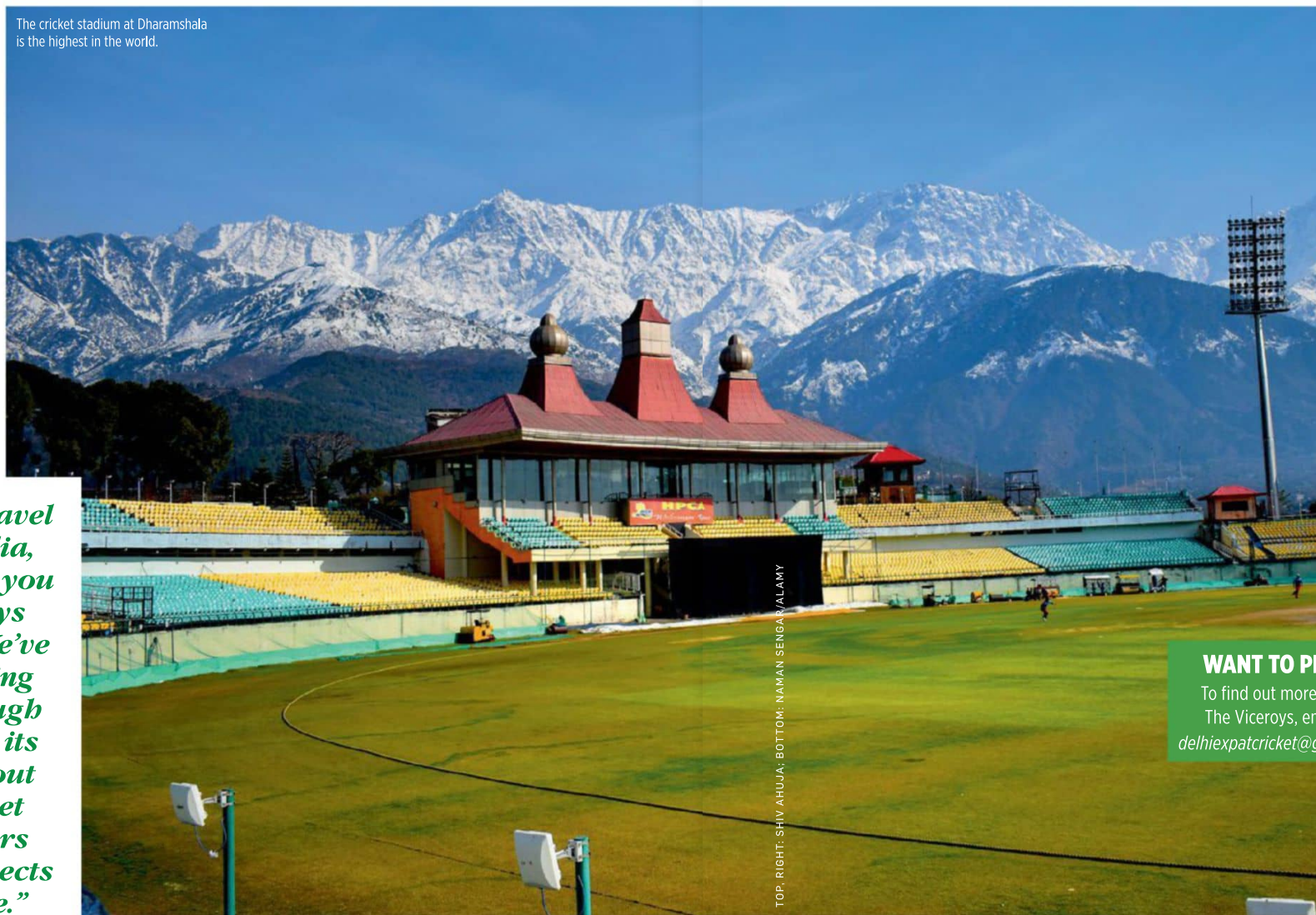
Last week among my team mates were a US Navy SEAL (remains nameless, but not a word of sledging from the opposition) and a chap who makes robots. Robots? This week, we are an equally disparate band of brothers, but nonetheless enthused by Kingfisher and the local egg rolls.

I've bowled four very varying overs (defined more by width than length and line), so have opted out of the bat. Well, actually was asked to step aside by the Club President, Joe Phelan, "so everyone gets a go."

It's no loss and under the glaring light of the flood lights and a plague of mosquitoes, we sit and watch our openers. It's as good a time as any to quiz him about the Roys' spirit: "There's an argument to say that we are the worst cricket team in the whole of

"We get to travel around India, see an India you don't always get to see. We've seen amazing things through cricket. But it's not just about that. Cricket here mirrors so many aspects of daily life."

The cricket stadium at Dharamshala is the highest in the world.



TOP, RIGHT: SHIV AHUJA; BOTTOM: NAMAN SENGUPTA/ALAMY

the country because we have people who play for us, who have never picked up a bat before in their lives," I can only nod and watch a full pitched ball totally deceive one of our Americans. He survived.

"Our average age is 46, so even those who have played cricket are in the August of their best." I tell him it's possibly September. Middle to back end. October, possibly.

He laughs, then gets slightly irate, but verging on profound. "Hey, it also makes us the best cricket team in the country because the team spirit says anyone can come along and have a go," He means it. Club Captain, Tom Carroll, who's been adjusting his pads and next up to bat, adds his ten penny's worth.

"Mate," (he's Australian, so everything starts with 'Mate', or something unprintable), "The Viceroy's will give you a bat if you have never batted, a bowl, a cold beer, and a laugh at the post match 'debrief'. We all work some tricky and

demanding jobs, but you'll see more of India this way, then any tour operator can..."

Wicket.

Something unprintable is uttered from the middle and another of tonight's Australians, Mutt Murray, trudges back to our makeshift pavilion, shaking his head.

While Mutt bemoans the umpire, the pitch, cricket, and everything else this side of civilisation, for the 'thin edge to the wicket keeper' that never was, for the rest of the evening, Joe concludes Tom's sentiment: "He's spot on. We get to travel around India, see an India you don't always get to see. We've seen some amazing things through cricket. Doors have opened through cricket. But it's not just about that. Cricket here mirrors so many aspects of daily life. Highs and lows, so it's also a great leveller."

Six. Wicket. Two. Wicket. The story of the night. We lose again, but only just. It's not always this way, though. We have two players capable of tons and ripping the opposition's bowling apart. A few more accomplished stroke players and there's enough flair and experience through the batting to give younger sides a run for their money. The same applies with the ball; we've some pace and plenty of guile (why, even I've bagged three wickets once upon a dream). I've also seen guys who've barely picked up a bat smack the thing for six and watched virgin bowlers deliver a peach that rips out the middle stump. The point is that every dog has his day. We just never know which dogs and which days.

Driving back through South Delhi later that night, I can't help but agree. It sounds a bit gooey, but we are always winners. The result, a distant second cousin to camaraderie and being part of a 'real' India.

There are plans to travel up to Jim Corbett National Park to a tiny ground situated the other side of the river from a delightful little property called The Den (thedencorbett.in). Talk of getting up to Dharamshala to play at the highest cricket ground in the world. Getting back to Jodhpur where none other than the Maharaja himself was among the crowd last time. Then, there's the annual staples of Goa in February and a balmy Mumbai to consider.

One thing is for sure, the runs I concede bowling are going to grow. Rapidly. But, so are my Air Miles and knowledge of this beguiling country.

More than that, it's the deeper dive (no pun intended, I cannot dive for catches these days), 'playing' cricket has given me into the city of Delhi I live in. I claimed to know it, understand it, but I am so much better equipped; my knowledge and understanding of its people, history, and geography richer, now I have The Viceroy's and a bat and ball in my hand.*

WANT TO PLAY?

To find out more about The Viceroy's, email at delhiexpatcricket@gmail.com

**The author cannot guarantee that the 'ball' will either start or end up in his hand!*

India Survival Guide

Planning a trip to India? Look no further. Here's everything you need to know when you're travelling to this incredible country.



CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE*

(Indian Rupees)
USD \$1 = ₹69.82
Euro €1 = ₹78.41
Pound £1 = ₹90.77

FOREX

bookmyforex.com
currencykart.com



TEMPERATURE (MAY-JUNE)

Delhi
High: 40°C, Low: 27°C

Mumbai
High: 34°C, Low: 26°C

Bengaluru
High: 31°C, Low: 20°C

Kolkata
High: 35°C, Low: 25°C

Chennai
High: 38°C, Low: 29°C



TIME

Indian Standard Time
(GMT/UTC + 5 ½ hours)



USEFUL APPS/WEBSITES

- Uber/Ola (for cabs)
- Zoomcar (for car rentals)
- IRCTC Connect (for train ticketing)
- redBus (for bus ticketing)
- MakeMyTrip (for air ticketing)
- AudioCompass (for audio tour guide)
- Google Translate (for language translation)
- Zomato/Swiggy (for ordering food)
- BookMyShow (for movies/events)
- Justdial (for search info)
- AccuWeather (for weather info)



PHONE CODES

Country Code: 91
International
Access Code: 00

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

National Emergency
Number: 112
Police Control Room: 100
Fire Control: 101
Ambulance: 102
Women's Helpline: 1091
Disaster Control: 108
Traffic Police: 1095
Anti-Terror Helpline: 1090
Road Accident
Emergency: 1073
Railway Accident
Emergency: 1072

EMBASSY CONTACTS

United States
(011) 2419-8000
United Kingdom
(011) 2419-2100
Australia
(011) 4139-9900
Canada
(011) 4178-2000
Germany
(011) 4419-9199
France
(011) 4319-6100
United Arab Emirates
(011) 2611-1111
China
(011) 2611-2345
Spain
(011) 4129-3000
Turkey
(011) 2688-9053
Israel
(011) 3041-4500

COMMON LINGO

Out of 22 official languages spoken in India, Hindi is the official and most commonly used language.

- Yes: *Haan*
- No: *Nahi*
- May be: *Shayad*
- Hello: *Namastey*
- Thank you: *Shukriya*
- Can you help me: *Kya aap meri madad karenge*
- Where is...: *...kahan hai*
- How much does this cost: *Yeh kitne ka hai*
- I don't know Hindi: *Mujhe Hindi nahi aati*
- I didn't understand: *Mujhe samajh nahi aaya*
- I am lost: *Main kho gaya* (male)/*gayi* (female) *hoon*

(NUMBERS)

- 1: *Ek*
- 2: *Do*
- 3: *Teen*
- 4: *Chaar*
- 5: *Paanch*
- 6: *Chhay*
- 7: *Saat*
- 8: *Aath*
- 9: *Nau*
- 10: *Das*
- 100: *Sau*
- 500: *Paanch Sau*
- 1,000: *Hazaar*
- 2,000: *Do Hazaar*

DRY DAYS

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| • January 15 | • May 1 | • September 28 |
| • January 26 | • May 18 | • October 2 |
| • January 30 | • June 5 | • October 8 |
| • February 19 | • July 16 | • October 13 |
| • March 4 | • August 12 | • October 27 |
| • March 20 | • August 15 | • November 9 |
| • April 14 | • August 24 | • November 12 |
| • April 17 | • September 2 | • December 25 |

LEGAL DRINKING AGE

The average drinking age as per the law in India is between 18 and 25 years. Alcohol consumption is completely banned in Bihar, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, and Nagaland.

SCAMS TO AVOID



CAB SERVICE

Always book yourself a cab from an authorised car service like the legitimate prepaid booth at airports and stations, or by using an app. Else, ask your hotel for a pick-up prior to your arrival.



LOCAL SIM

Getting a SIM card in India requires you to fill out a form, and submit a copy of your identity proof and a photograph. If the detailed procedure isn't carried out, chances are you will be handed over an expired or used SIM card.



TRAIN TICKETS

Buy train tickets online from reputable travel agents or from the booth at the train station. Do not trust anybody (even dressed in a uniform, wearing an ID) offering you a ticket at the station who is not behind the booth.



TOUR GUIDES

Beware of the unofficial guides lurking at popular tourist spots, who are most likely to be unaware of the real information, and charge you exorbitantly. Inquire about hiring an official guide at the ticket counter.



HOTELS

Do not trust a local driver/anyone telling you that your hotel has been shut down or is completely booked due to some festival. You might be offered to stay at the only 'cheaper' alternative available. Call your hotel, and confirm yourself.



FOOD & HYGIENE

Avoid having food or water at shabby or unhygienic restaurants. Always carry your bottled water and packed food while travelling. While trying street food, be careful with the condition of the shops.

MAJOR AIRPORTS



GOA

Goa International Airport
(goanairport.com)

BENGALURU

Kempegowda International Airport
(bengaluruairport.com)

JAIPUR

Jaipur International Airport
(jaipurairport.com)

NEW DELHI

Indira Gandhi International Airport
(newdelhiairport.in)

MUMBAI

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport
(csia.in)

KOCHI

Cochin International Airport
(cial.aero)

CHENNAI

Chennai International Airport
(chennaiairport.com)

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

January 1:

New Year's Day

January 15:

Makar Sankranti/
Pongal

January 26:

Republic Day

March 4:

Maha Shivaratri

March 21:

Holi

April 17:

Mahavir Jayanti

April 19:

Good Friday

May 18:

Buddha Purnima

June 5:

Eid-ul- Fitr

August 12:

Eid-ul-Zuha

(Bakri Eid)

August 15:

Independence Day

August 24:

Janmashtami

September 10:

Muharram

October 2:

Gandhi Jayanti

October 8:

Dussehra

October 27:

Diwali (Deepavali)

November 10:

Eid-ul-Milad

November 12:

Guru Nanak's birthday

December 25:

Christmas Day

THINGS TO CARRY & PACK

- Get travel insurance before arrival
- Carry a pouch with passport and visa at all times
- Portable water filter
- Air mask
- Power adapter for Indian sockets
- Electrolyte or charcoal tablets (for diarrhea and dysentery)
- Probiotics (to improve digestion and immunity)
- Mosquito repellent/bug spray
- Sunscreen lotion of SPF 50 or above
- UV protected sunglasses
- Silk scarf and woollen shawl
- Hand sanitiser, toilet rolls, and wet wipes
- A padlock/chain (for luggage in trains)





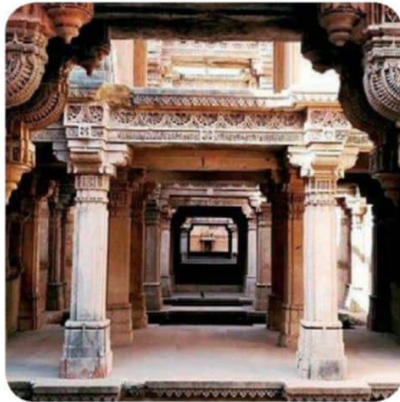
#Insta inspire!

Share your travel photographs with @discoverindia.magazine on Instagram using #indiainframes and stand a chance to get featured here!



@nikondxfx

The Naga Falls in Sikkim is breathtaking, and requires a trek to reach.



@pavitrakrishnan612

Built in 1499, Adalaj Ni Vav is a stepwell in the quiet village of Adalaj near Ahmedabad, Gujarat.



@reflectionsbyprajakta

A road trip to Nubra Valley, a high-altitude cold desert in Ladakh, is a must on your India itinerary.



@thatthikerboy

Season's first snowfall calls for celebrations in Pin Valley, Himachal Pradesh.



@photo_wala

A ride on country boats is the best way to explore River Tungabhadra in South India's Hampi.



@photosticlife

A regular day at the Maniktala Crossing in the 'City of Joy', Kolkata in West Bengal.



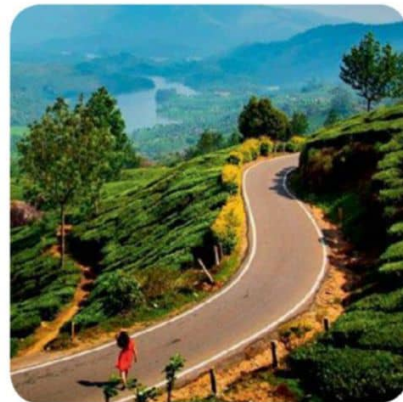
@arushi_bhal

The 'monument of love', Taj Mahal, as seen from Mehtab Bagh in Agra.



@digantarajkhona

River Dihing is a tributary of River Brahmaputra, which flows through China, India, and Bangladesh.



@thetravellerlens

The pristine landscapes of Chinnakanal village in Munnar, Kerala appeal to intrepid travellers.

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**STATUE OF
UNITY**
एक भारत, श्रेष्ठ भारत.

A MONUMENT AS TALL AS ITS HERO

Architect of United India

The Statue of Unity, being the World's Tallest Statue, pays a fitting tribute to India's 'Iron Man', Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel - who with his visionary statesmanship united 564 scattered and recalcitrant princely States to form a unified India. This inspirational colossus stands as a beacon to future generations and as the pride of India.

A Notch above the Rest

The 182 metre Statue of Unity is situated at the Sadhu-Bet Island, approximately 3.5 km south of the Sardar Sarovar Dam at Kevadia between the Vindhyachal and Satpuda Ranges in the Narmada district of Gujarat. A 300 m long bridge connects the Sadhu Bet to the Memorial and Visiting Centre, which has been developed at the site having all the attractive facets of a tourist hub with both edutainment and entertainment features. An Exhibition Hall is also developed as a visitor attraction focussing on the contributions of Sardar Patel. Many other sightseeing facilities accord a rare enjoyable ambience to visitors at the Statue of Unity.

Out-of-the-world Atmosphere

Statue of Unity and its premises have been conceived and developed as an outstanding tourist hub. A visit to the site is going to be an unforgettable experience for every visitor.

Exceptional Attractions



**Shrestha
Bharat Bhavan**



**Museum &
3D Projection Mapping**



Research Centre



**Monument
View Point**



Tent City



**Valley of
Flowers**

Upcoming Attractions:



Horse Ride



**Water Sports
including Boating**

**Come to the World's Tallest Statue to know more about
this Visionary Leader.**

Best time to Visit: The Statue of Unity site is open to tourists for visit every day from 09:00 AM to 05:00 PM. The site remains closed on Mondays, so you can plan your trip accordingly.



For Further Information, log on to: www.gujarattourism.com
For Tent City Booking, log on to: www.tentcitynarmada.com
For Ticket Booking, log on to: www.soutickets.in

www.statueofunity.in